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ABSTRACT

This study demonstrates that symbolic play has merit as a curricular tool for early literacy development. Naturalistic observation of four prekindergarten teachers and their classes revealed ways in which teachers can facilitate early literacy development by functioning as participants within the context of young children's spontaneous symbolic play. Children participating in the study were midwestern, middle-class, mainly white preschoolers between 3 and 5 years of age. In-service training to further teachers' understanding of natural literacy development preceded data collection. During a 2-week period, data were gathered for 30-minute periods for 8 days, primarily by means of videotaping and audiotaping of children's symbolic play in play centers used in the classrooms. Primary data were supplemented with teachers' recorded observations and children's written language products. Analysis of teaching-learning episodes was based on Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development. Each teacher's behaviors were classified as either extending or redirecting. The teachers evinced extending and redirecting interaction styles, but to different degrees. All four teachers used considerably more extending than redirecting interaction. Findings supported Vygotsky's theory and suggested pedagogical implications for early childhood teachers and teacher educators. Examples of children's functionl writing are included and approximately 70 references are cited. (RH)

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SYMBOLIC PLAY AS A CURRICULAR TOOL FOR EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the merit of symbolic play as a teaching-learning medium for early literacy development. The study also attempted to answer the following question: In what ways can teachers facilitate early literacy development by functioning as participants within the context of young children's spontaneous symbolic play? Data collection was preceded by inservice training to enable the participating teachers to understand natural literacy development. Videotapings and audiotapings during symbolic play served as the primary means of data collection. These were supported with teacher recorded observations and children's written language productions. Analysis of the teaching-learning episodes was based on Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development. Each teacher's behaviors were classified as either extending or redirecting. The teachers demonstrated both extending and redirecting interaction styles, but to different degrees. All four teachers used considerably more extending than redirecting interaction. Findings led to support for Vygotsky's theory and to important pedagogical implications for early childhood teachers and teacher educators.

SYMBOLIC PLAY AS A CURRICULAR TOOL FOR EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Carol Taylor Schrader

Symbolic play is valuable to the young child primarily as a medium for learning. According to Piaget (1962, p. 73), such play is "never a behavior which is an end in itself. It is always a continuation of understanding, but in the direction of differentiation with respect to new models. The child imitates an aeroplane or a tower because he understands their significance, and he is only interested in them when they have some bearing on his own activities. Consequently, symbolic play is never anything more than a vehicle." Piaget's extensive studies have shown us how children come to understand and make sense of their experiences through symbolic play.

Vygotsky (1978, p. 129) also discussed the value of play for young children. "In their play children project themselves into the adult activities of their culture and rehearse their future roles and values. Thus, play is in advance of development, for in this manner children begin to acquire the motivation, skills, and attitudes necessary for their social partipation. During preschool and school years the conceptual abilities of children are stretched through play. In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behavior, in play it is as though he were a

head taller than himself." Vygotsky argued that play **leads** development.

Play, Cognition, and Language Development

The value of play as a facilitator of cognitive growth has been addressed by many early childhood educators and researchers (Almy, 1967; Athey, 1974, Caplan & Caplan, 1973; Christie, 1980; Curry & Arnoud, 1974; D'Hurle & Fiemer, 1971; Fein, 1981; Frank, 1968; Golomb, 1977; Golomb & Cornelius, 1977; Gross, 1974; Jackson & Angeline, 1974; Murphy, 1972; Robison, 1971; Sinclair-De-Zwart, 1969; Smilansky, 1968; Vygotsky, 1966; Yawkey, 1979, 1980). These writers claim that play has an important role in cognitive development. More specifically, studies by Sylva, Bruner, and Genova (1976), Dansky and Silverman (1973, 1977) suggest that engaging children in symbolic play leads to increased performance on problem-solving and divergent thinking.

A number of researchers have investigated the relationship between play and oral language development (Bowers & London, 1975; Buescher, 1979; Flavel, 1966; Heathcote, 1970; Irwin, 1975; Jurkovic, 1978; Levy, 1984; Lovinger, 1974; Marbach & Yawkey, 1980; McCune-Nicolich, 1981; Pellegrini, 1982, 1983, 1985a; Sherrod, Siewert, Cavallora, 1984; Wolfgang & Sanders, 1981; Yawkey, 1979; Yawkey & Hrncir, 1982). Generally the findings suggest that the development of symbolic play, cognition and oral language tend to occur together and correlate highly between the ages of one and five years.

Play and Literacy Development

Relationships between symbolic play and literacy development have been reported by a few (Gentile & Hoot, 1983; Isenberg & Jacob, 1983b; Jacob, 1984; Pellegrini, 1980, 1985b; Schickedanz, 1978; and Wolfgang, 1974). These studies suggest that children use similar representational mental processes in both symbolic play and literate behavior.

Studies of young children as writers and readers in play settings were conducted by Isenberg and Jacob (1983a) and Schrader (1988). Young children spontaneously incorporated literacy concepts and knowledge of literacy artifacts into their play activities. They wrote for real-life purposes, read their writing, and discussed the meaning of their written langauge with their classmates and teachers.

Vygotsky's (1978, pp. 110, 111, 116) empirical studies of three-, four-, and five-year-olds led him to conclude that "second-order symbolism develops in play, and consequently make-believe play can be seen as a major contributor to the development of written language --- a system of second-order symbolism. Symbolic representation in play is essentially a particular form of speech at an earlier stage, one which leads directly to written language. Make-believe play and writing can be viewed as different moments in an essentially unified process of development of written language." In other words, we can view the process

of the development of written language as one which leads from oral language, through symbolic play, to written language.

The Teacher's Role

In these studies, teachers assumed their traditional role of preparer of the classroom environment. They provided adequate space and theme-related play materials. They scheduled play periods which were long enough for children to plan and carry out play ideas. They provided background experiences such as trips to the fire station, animal hospital, and post office. They complemented these with books, films, pictures, and discussions.

Play-training studies (Feitelson & Ross, 1973; Lovinger, 1974; Rosen, 1974; Rubin, Maioni, & Hornung, 1976; Saltz & Johnson, 1974 Saltz, Dixon, & Johnson, 1977; Singer, 1973; Smilansky, 1968; Woodard, 1984; Yawkey & Fox, 1981), however, have involved the teacher in attempting to increase the amount and quality of children's symbolic play by teaching them to use specific symbolic play techniques, primarily as an intervention technique to stimulate disadvantaged children's cognitive development. In such studies teachers were instructed to actually join in the children's play, to take a role, demonstrate using objects as symbols, and model role-appropriate behavior and language.

Some limitations, however, were placed on these teachers. In Smilansky's (1968, p. 95) study, for example,

teachers were cautioned "not to influence the content of the child's play, but rather to aid the child in its fuller elaboration." Intervention by the teacher was limited to suggestions, comments, questions, and demonstrations. The teacher encouraged and enabled the child to do what the child had wanted to do.

Theoretical support for the teacher as participant is provided by Vygotsky (1978, 86-91). He identified a "zone of proximal development" as the "distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers." It is the area in which a child can solve problems by working with others, especially with an adult. This is the area that Vygotsky feels is especially important in a child's learning --- that area where a child, with help, can go beyond his or her present developmental level. Adult-child interaction, then, becomes crucial in that it provides necessary assistance as the child stretches beyond his or her level of development. Vygotsky (p. 90) views learning as a profoundly social process, emphasizes dialogue and the varied roles that language plays in instruction and in mediated cognitive growth. Thus, Vygotsky's theory implies that teacher-child interaction within play settings in the form of suggested ideas, posed questions, or noted observations can enable the child to progress in learning.

Play as a Curricular Tool for Literacy Development

Teachers of young children are currently under a great deal of pressure from school administrators and parents to use inappropriate formal teaching techniques and to over-emphasize achievement of narrowly defined academic skills (NAEYC, 1986; Elkind, 1986). Many teachers limit the amount of symbolic play in favor of such activities because they do not fully understand how they can legitimately use play to accomplish educational objectives. They cannot explain how symbolic play facilitates learning in the content areas, nor do they know how to function effectively within the context of the child's play.

Empirical research is needed to test assumptions and theories and to demonstrate ways in which symbolic play functions as a valuable teaching and learning medium during early childhood. More specifically, evidence is needed to support the teacher's participation in symbolic play and it's use as a curricular tool for teaching and learning writing and reading during the early years.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the merit of symbolic play as a teaching - learning medium for early literacy development. The study also attempted to answer the following question: In what ways can teachers facilitate early literacy development by functioning as participants within the context of young children's spontaneous symbolic play?

Definition of Play versus Nonplay

When does play become nonplay? Garvey's (1977, p. 4) criteria was used to define play: 1) Play is spontaneous and voluntary. The extent to which the child still has control over the play situation determines the activity as play. As long as the child can decide whether or not to be involved, and when to switch activities, it continues to be play. 2) Play has no extrinsic goals. The child's motivations are instrinsic and serve no other objectives. 3) Play is pleasurable, enjoyable. The child positively values the activity. 4) Play involves some active engagement on the part of the player. Nonplay does not fully meet Garvey's criteria.

The present study rested upon the following a priori assumptions:

a. Symbolic play functions as a powerful medium for learning during the years from two to seven.
b. Such play facilitates cognitive and oral language development.
c. Symbolic play can also serve as a medium for early literacy development.
d. The teacher as participant, properly controlled, can effectively use symbolic play as a curricular tool for early literacy teaching and learning.
e. The teacher must first fully understand the natural process of learning to write and read in young children before she can successfully facilitate that learning process.

METHOD

Participants

Four prekindergarten teachers from three early childhood education centers were selected as participants in the study. Each of the teachers has a college degree in elementary education.

Two of the teachers worked in two classrooms of a university laboratory preschool. The other two teachers worked in two different private community preschools. All three faciltities are in the same small midwestern community. The children who attended the preschools were three-, four-, and five-year-olds from middleclass families. A few children are from minority racial and ethnic groups.

Procedures

The Role of the Teacher

The teachers' role was that of participant observer. Each one participated spontaneously in the play experiences with the children. After a writing event the teacher recorded her observations of what a child had written and read. These observations were shared with the researcher.

Teacher participation was not intended to control or direct the content of the children's play but only to assist the children in extending their play more fully. Teachers were instructed to first listen and observe to determine the child's intentions. They could then use comments,

questions, suggestions, and modeling to help the child go beyond his or her level of development.

Teacher Training Procedures

To be able to ascertain the child's intentions the teachers had to operate from a knowledge base of the natural development of literacy in young children. Consequently, teachers were exposed to the sociopsycholiguistic theory of early written language development during a three-part workshop. Instructional principles were abstracted from this theory, and demonstrations were provided of how these principles translate into practice.

The First Meeting: The researcher brought the teachers together and presented an overview of the natural development of literacy in young children. Research findings of Clay (1975), Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982), and Read (1973, 1975) were discussed. Samples of children's early writings were provided: cursive-like marks, invented symbols, random letters, and invented spellings. (See Appendix A.) Halliday's (1973, 1978) functional-interactional theory of young children's early language development was presented along with its implications for written language development. A videotape of the researcher and a four-year-old child participating in functional writing activities was viewed and discussed. The teachers were then given the following professional journal articles to read and discuss at the next meeting.

Isenberg, J & Jacob, E. (1983) Literacy and symbolic play: A review of the literature. Childhood Education, Mar/Apr , 272-275.

Schickedanz, J. (1978) "You be the doctor and I'll be sick": Preschoolers learn the language arts through play. Language Arts, 55 (6) 713-718.

The Second Meeting: The researcher invited comments and questions pertaining to the journal articles which the teachers had read. A videotape of a teache and a four-year-old child drawing and writing was viewed and discussed. The researcher pointed out those language and teaching strategies which enabled the child to undersand and participate freely in the writing event. Attention was also brought to those behaviors that seemed to confuse or stifle the child's efforts (Schrader & Hoffman, 1987).

TEACHING STRATEGIES DURING WRITTEN LANGUAGE EVENTS

ENABLING STRATEGIES	LIMITING STRATEGIES
Establish functional purpose for writing.	Have child write only "known" words.
Encourage risk-taking and child initiative.	Supply letters or spell for child.
Provide appropriate cues and suggestions.	Write for child and have child copy.
Model writing for the child, write with him/her.	Attend to letter formation, penmanship.
Confirm, support, accept child's own efforts.	Attend to spacing.
Respond interactively to child.	Attend to directionality.
Give appropriate praise.	Attend to punctuation and capitals.
Have child read own writing while writing.	Correct, reject child's efforts.
Encourage oral rehearsal of intended writing.	Take control of child's writing process.
Read child's writing.	
Model reading of teacher's writing for child.	

The teachers then viewed videotapes of children participating in functional writing within the context of their spontaneous symbolic play. Examples of the children's writings were provided. (See Appendix B.) Piaget and Vygotsky's theories of the value of play as a learning

medium and the implications for literacy learning were discussed.

Additional professional journal articles were given to the teachers for reading and later discussion.

Chafel, J. (1982) Making early literacy a natural happening. Childhood Education, May/June, 300-304.

Griffing, P. (1983) Encouraging dramatic play in early childhood. Young Children, , 13-22.

Irwin, E. (1975) Facilitating children's language development through play. The Speech Teacher, 24, 15-23.

Woodward, C. (1984) Guidelines for facilitating sociodramatic play. Childhood Education, 172-177.

The Third Meeting: The researcher again invited comments and questions pertaining to the journal articles read by the teachers. Additional videotapes of children writing within the context of their symbolic play were viewed and discussed. The researcher and teachers discussed ways in which a teacher could interact with a child in a play setting to extend the child's learning experience more fully. The issue of teacher versus child control was talked about.

Data Collection Procedures

The naturalistic inquiry paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was employed for the study. This approach was deemed appropriate for several reasons. Literacy teaching and learning are holistic social processes. Naturalistic inquiry permits observation of these processes as they occur in the classrooms, provides rich, descriptive data of

adult-child interactions, and enables the researcher to observe links between teacher practices and effects on the child's developing writing and reading abilities.

Videotapings during spontaneous symbolic play served as the primary means for data collection. A week of researcher and videotaping equipment visitation enabled the teachers and children to ask questions and accept these changes in their classrooms.

The teachers were also audiotaped. Each teacher wore a small microphone and audiotape recorder. This enabled the researcher to capture the teacher-child dialogue as the teacher interacted with individual children.

The videotapings and audiotapings were supported with teacher recorded observations of the children's writing and reading behaviors. For example, after interacting with Mary the teacher recorded, "Mary's letter. 'Dear Mom and Dad, I love everybody in the whole wide world.' ." This enabled the researcher to verify the child's writing intentions.

The children's written language productions during the videotaped events were collected to further document the youngsters' writing behaviors. Teacher-child discussions of children's writing intentions were captured by the recordings. Thus, triangulated data collection was accomplished by (1) videotapings and audiotapings of the teachers' and children's behaviors and language during symbolic play, (2) children's written language productions, and (3) teacher recorded observations of children's writing

and reading behaviors. This procedure enabled the researcher to study the effectiveness of the teaching-learning episodes, to confirm the data, to obtain a check on the dependability of the data collected, and to give credibility to interpretations of the data (Evertson and Green, 1986; Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The teachers were videotaped and audiotaped for eight days during two weeks as they participated in symbolic play with the children. The play times were scheduled during the mornings for thirty minutes per day. The same housekeeping, post office, and office play centers were used in each of the four classrooms. (See Figures 1 and 2.)

Qualitative Anlaysis of Data

The teachers' and children's oral language, writing and reading behaviors, and corresponding actions were transcribed from the videotapes and audiotapes by the researcher. These typescripts were then compared with the participating teacher's recorded observations and the children's writings.

Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal developement suggested a particular coding scheme --- that of analyzing each teacher's interaction style as either Extending or Redirecting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, pp. 155-170; Tamburrini, 1982). **Extending Teacher Behaviors** are those which take their cue from the child and are based on the teacher's assessment of what the child is paying attention to and is

Figure 1

The Symbolic Play Centers

Days 1 - The House, Post Office, and Office.

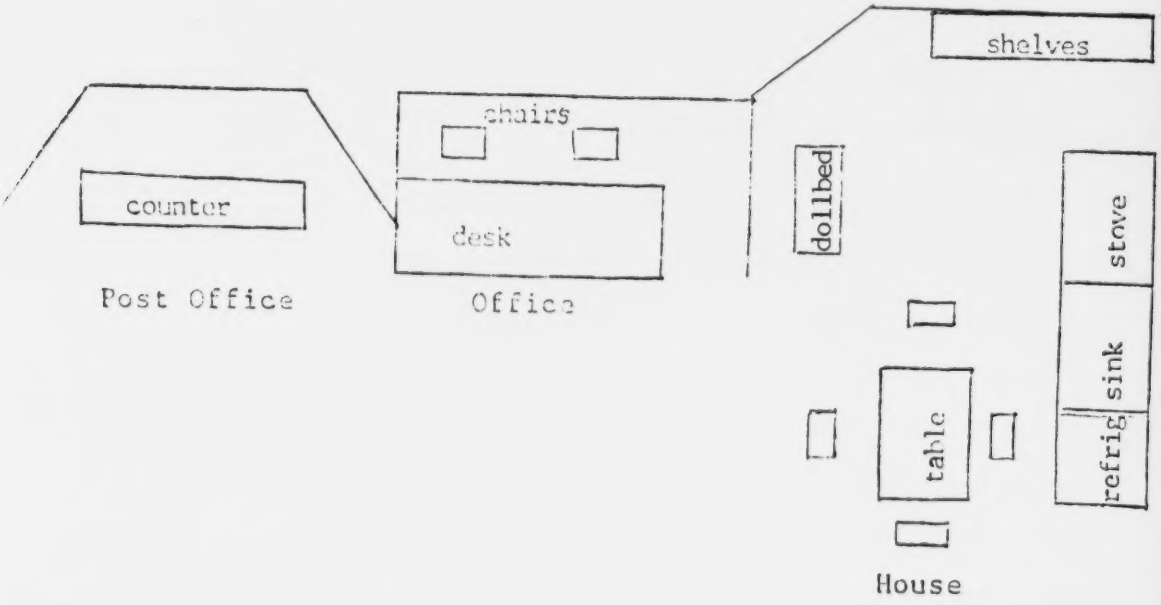

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Figure 2

Center I **The House**

Description of Contents: The housekeeping area contained equipment and props traditional to such an area: stove, sink, refrigerator, kitchen accessories, table, chairs, doll bed and blankets, shelves, dolls and accessories, dressup clothes, and telephone. Added to this, however, were literacy materials: housekeeping magazines, local newspaper, telephone book, checkbooks with checks, paper, and pencils. The area was walled on three sides with a cardboard. Pictures of family members participating in household activities were posted on the walls.

Center II **The Office**

Description of Contents: The office consisted of a table with two chairs and office supplies: two telephones, two telephone books, business stationery, envelopes, business forms, cash receipts, checks, paper clips, rubber bands, file folders, junk mail, scissors, paste, and pencils. The office area was walled on three sides by a cardboard. A sign, "The Office, and a picture of people working in an office were posted on the walls.

Center III **The Post Office**

Description of Contents: The post office consisted of a school desk containing junk mail, envelopes, plain paper, stickers, photocopied stamps, paste, scissors, and pencils. A real mailcarrier's hat and mailbag were placed nearby. The desk top served as a counter and was equipped with a mailbox and a scale. The mailbox had a slot in the front and a large opening in the back. It was covered on five sides with pictures depicting mailing activities. The area was walled on three sides by a cardboard. Pictures of mailcarriers at work were posted on the walls. A sign "Post Office" and labels "mailman" were also posted on the walls.

trying to accomplish. The teacher interacts with the child only after first ascertaining the nature of the child's intentions. **Redirecting Teacher Behaviors** are those which require the child to shift his or her focus of attention because the teacher's own preconceived priorities intervene in the play episode. This style frequently results in the play activity becoming nonplay --- the child loses control.

The effects of the teachers' interaction styles on the child's developing reading and writing were studied. The guiding question was: How effective were the teacher and child in negotiating the child's zone of proximal development in interactive writing events?

Coding decisions for each teaching-learning episode were based on three sources of data: the videotapes and audiotapes, the children's written language productions, and the participating teacher's recorded observations. Analysis was crosschecked by a second researcher who was selected for content area and process expertise. Consensus was reached for all examples.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Each teacher's interaction styles were revealed not only by her language and behaviors during teaching-learning episodes, but also by a diagnosis of children's intentions and subsequent language and behaviors. Each teacher demonstrated both extending and redirecting styles, but to different degrees. All four teachers used considerably more extending style than redirecting style interaction. Figures

3, 4, 5, and 6 and Tables 1 and 2 summarize for each teacher the percentage per day of occurrences of each style of teaching-learning episode.

Space limitations do not permit reproduction of the profuse quantity of data collected. Consequently, examples were selected for illustration.

Teacher - Charlene Smith

Extending Style Interaction

Charlene consistently approached children who were engrossed in their play by asking, "What are you working on?" The teacher continued on the basis of the children's explanations: "I'm writing a letter. I'm writing a check." Charlene then asked questions which led children to talk about the content and purpose of their writing: "Who are you writing to? What are you telling them?" She consistently invited children to read their writing to her and to show where they had written what they were reading: "Can you read to me what that says? Where does it say that?" Children responded by pointing to and reading their writing. Charlene later read two children's writings to other interested children.

She extended episodes by making suggestions for continued writing: "Did you write the address on the envelope? You could buy a stamp. You could write a check for it. You could fill out the order form [to order the book]. How about if you make her a ticket? It would

Figure 3. Teacher - Charlene

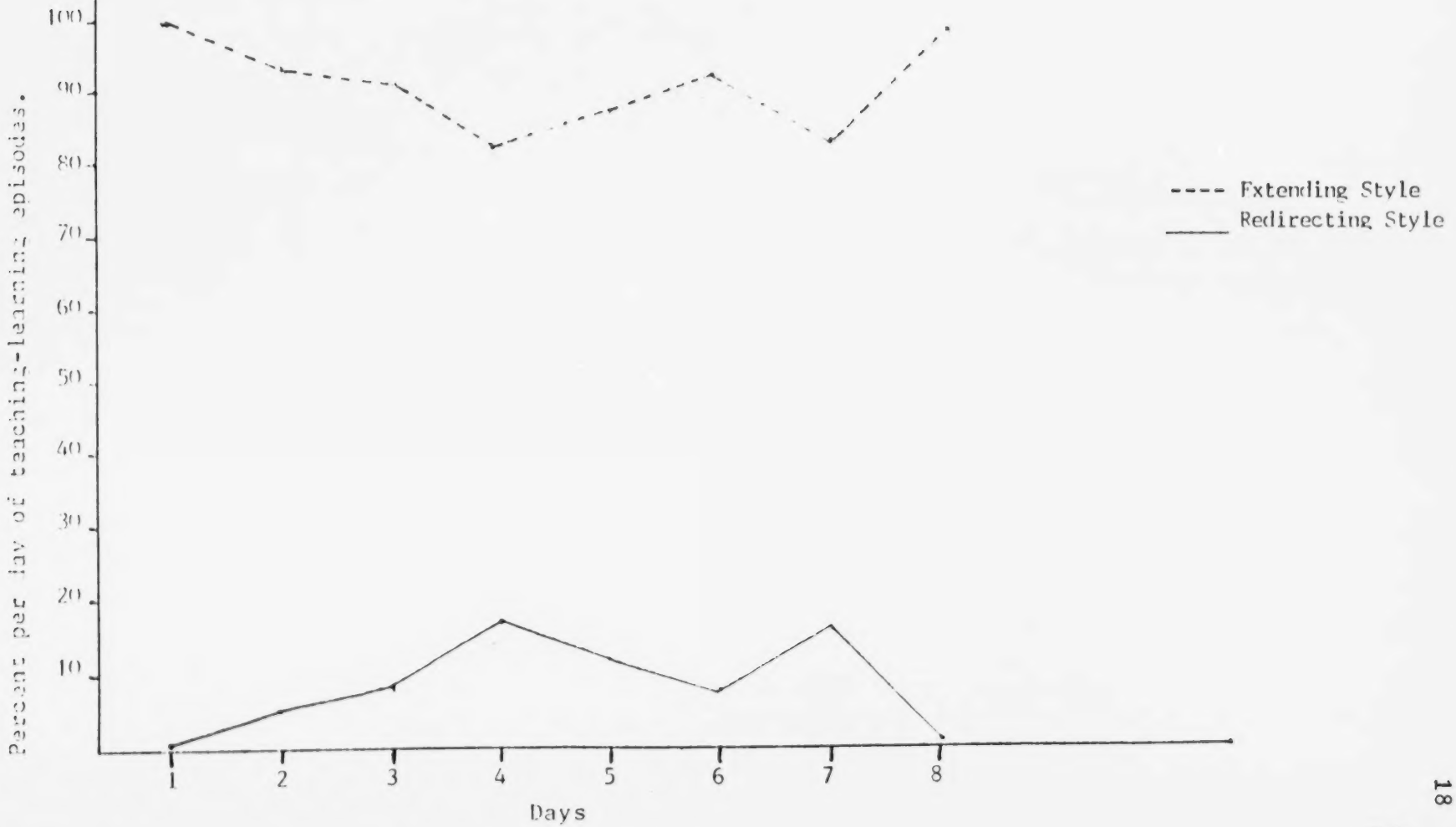


Figure 4. Teacher - Barbara

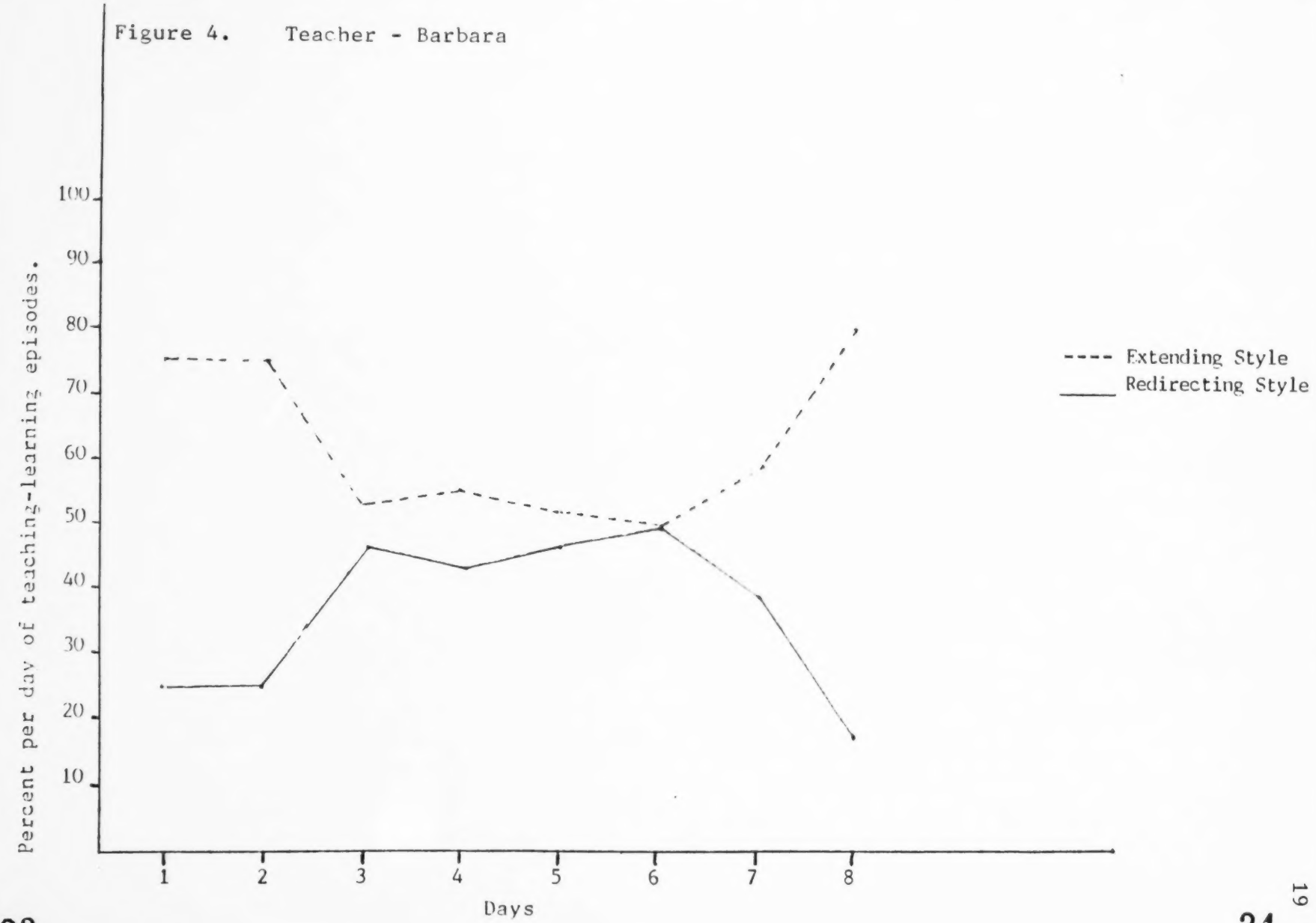


Figure 5. Teacher ~ Debra

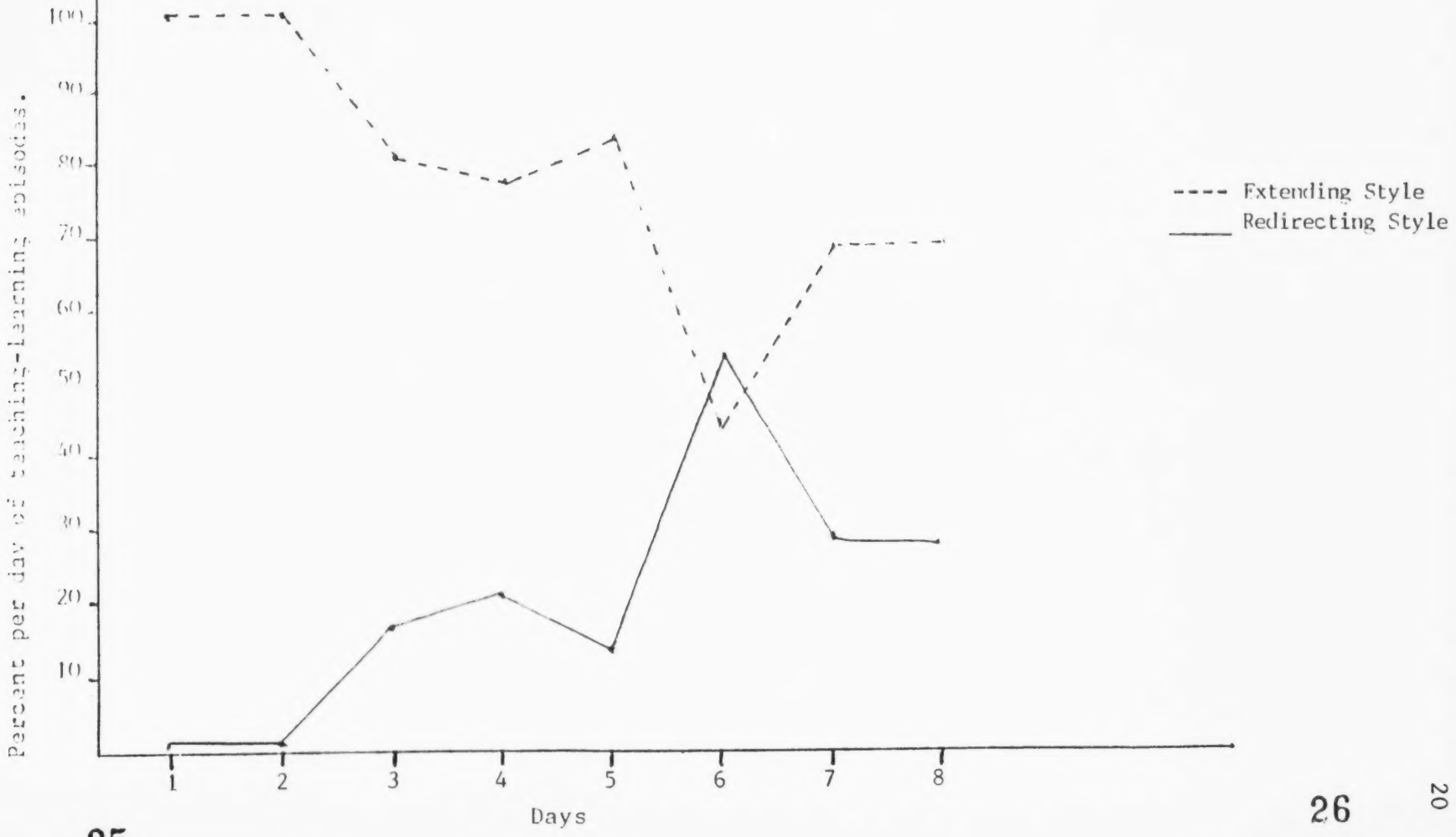


Figure 6. Teacher - Carla

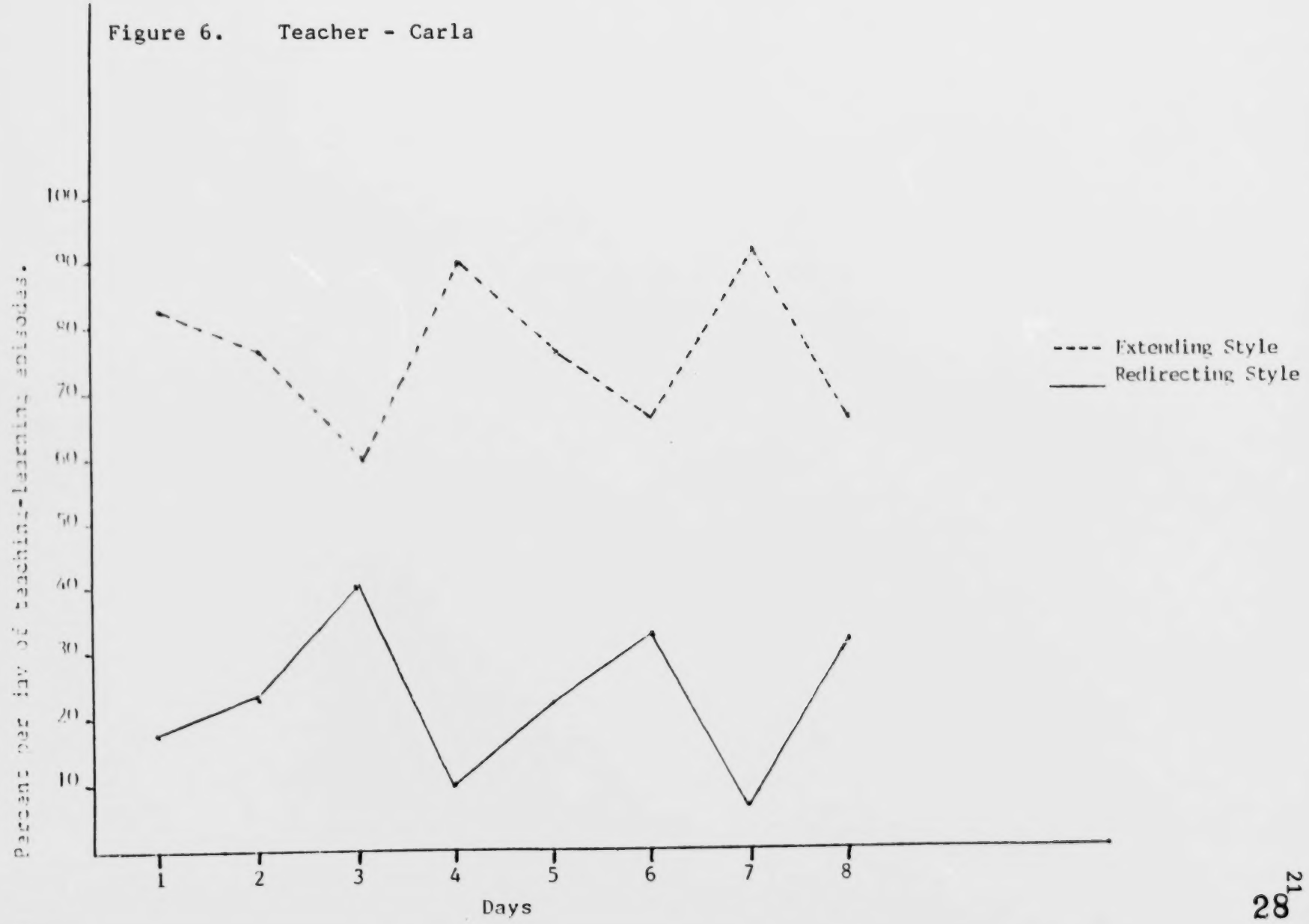


Table 1. Percent Per Day of Extending Style Interaction

	Charlene	Barbara	Debra	Carla
Day 1	100%	75%	100%	83%
2	94	75	100	77
3	92	53	81	60
4	82	56	78	90
5	88	53	83	77
6	91	50	45	67
7	83	60	70	92
8	100	82	71	67

Table 2. Percent Per Day of Redirecting Style Interaction

	Charlene	Barbara	Debra	Carla
Day 1	0%	25%	0%	17%
2	6	25	0	23
3	8	47	19	40
4	18	44	22	10
5	12	47	17	23
6	9	50	55	33
7	17	40	30	8
8	0	18	29	33

probably be nice if you invite them all. Why don't you look it up in the phone book? You probably need to write his name on the envelope so you'll know it's his."

During two episodes, Charlene approached the children with a more specific question, "What company do you work for?" When the children indicated that they worked for a bank and a telephone company, the teacher proceeded to do business with those companies. She opened an account at the bank and deposited funds. She ordered telephone repair service at the phone company. Both episodes involved writing and reading by the children. See Figure 7 and the following episode.

Cody: (Sits at office desk handling papers and writing.)
T: What company do you work for?
Cody: Uh... We work for the bank a little while.
T: You work for the bank?
Cody: Yeah.
T: Ok. How about if I open an account and you fill out the form?
Cody: Ok.
T: Ok. Here's the form. (Hands paper to Cody.) First you need to write down my name.
Cody: How do I?
T: You can just write it the way you'd like to.
Cody: I don't.... I don't write very good.
T: That's ok. You write the best you can. What you think you should.
Cody: (Writes)
T: Write my name down.... on the form.... Mrs. Smith.
Cody: (Writes)
T: And then I'll tell you my address.
Cody: (Writes)
T: (Dictates her address and phone number slowly.)
Cody: (Writes each part as the teacher dictates.)
T: Can I deposit ten dollars in my savings account? Did you open it up?
Cody: Yeah. I still... We need a check. Ok?
T: Ok. Here's my ten dollars. (Hands check to Cody.) Open my account. Did you sign your name so I know that I have my savings account?
Cody: Yeah.

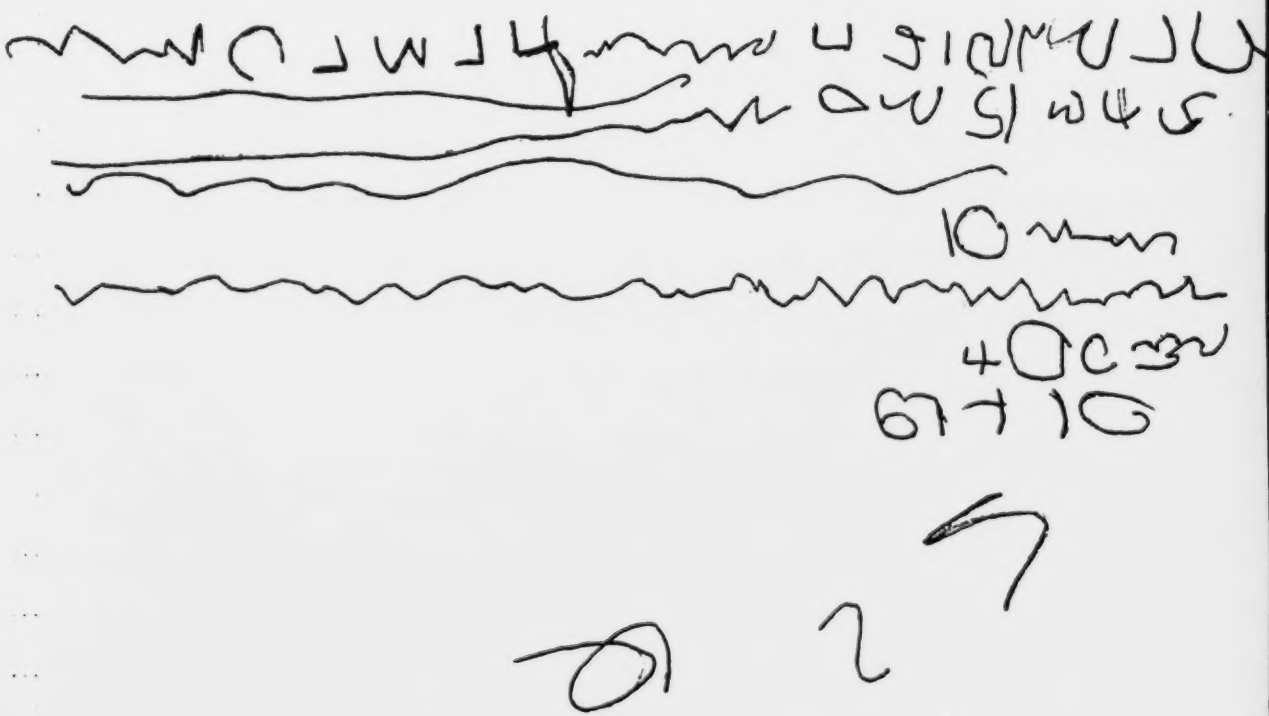


Figure 7. Cody's bank deposit form. He opened a savings account for the teacher and accepted a $10.00 check as the first deposit.

T: In that way any time I need to put money in the bank I can come here. And you'll mark it down for me.
Cody: Do I supposed to keep this ten dollars?
T: Yes, you keep the ten dollars and you give me the form.
Cody: Oh. (Puts form in envelope, licks and seals it, hands it to the teacher.) Here.
T: Thank you. Now when I bring my money I'll bring my form so that you can write down how much money I have in my savings account.
Cody: Ok.
T: Ok? (Leaves the bank.)
Cody: (Talks to child sitting next to him.) This lady gots ten dollars in the bank.

There were times when children asked the teacher to spell words for them, and Charlene provided them with the requested information. However, when children said they could not write, Charlene's usual response was, "Write whatever way you'd like to." or "Write it the way you want to." Children would then rely on their own concept of written language and write.

This teacher also acted to promote understanding by one child of another child's written language. For example, Katherine wrote a check for Evan and put it in the mailbox. The teacher took the check from the mailbox, gave it to Evan and said, "Evan, Katherine wrote this check to you. She thought you needed some money."

Redirecting Style Interaction

There were times when Charlene redirected children's attention to writing activities which they had not self-selected. These included writing a recipe, filling out an order form, and paying a bill. If a child went along with her suggetion the teacher provided necessary information to continue with the activity. If a child

ignored or rejected what she proposed Charlene did not press the child to continue.

Discussion

Charlene used primarily extending style interaction from the start. She consistently and methodically ascertained children's intentions before entering their play. She effectively used questions, comments, and suggestions to extend their self-selected writing activities. During the few episodes when Charlene redirected youngsters' attention to a writing activity of her choosing, she was sensitive to their negative responses and did not pressure them to continue. She demonstrated that she understood children's natural literacy development by her appropriate expectations and acceptance of their writing and reading efforts.

Teacher - Barbara Ray

Extending Style Interaction

Barbara was receptive and responsive to children who approached her with their writing. She asked questions to further understanding of their writing activities. For example, Adam was writing on a check and said, "Me making a check." The teacher responded with, "What are you writing the check for? How much money? Are you making your check for a lot of money or a little bit of money? What are you going to buy with your check?"

Barbara spelled for children upon request. She consistenly asked them to read their writing and inquired about addresses when children indicated that they had mail.

Grant: (Acts as mailcarrier, hands mail to teacher.) Here.
T: Who are you delivering that to?
Grant: You.
T: (Takes the letter and looks at both sides of it.) Where does it say my name?
Grant: (Takes the letter, returns to the post office, and talks to Andrew.) How do you spell Mrs. Ray? (Writes. Delivers the mail to the teacher.)

Barbara modeled doing business with the post office: "I have a package I need to mail, Mr. Mailman. I have this letter that I need to put in the mailbox. Can you tell me what time that letter will be delivered? 9 o'clock. Ok. How much money do I owe you to mail my letter? Fifty dollars. Ok. (Writes a check.) I'll write 50, a 5 and a zero. And here's my check."

Redirecting Style Interaction

When Barbara approached playing children she ignored what they might have been working on and redirected their attention to a writing activity of her choosing: "I'd like you to write me a story. OK? Write me a story. I need some assistance with my taxes. It's time for me to fix my income tax. Can you fix that for me? You might need to write some orders for your store. I'm ready for your order for your supplies at your store. Would you write out the order for your supplies, please, so I'll know what to get for you? Come and write me a receipt, please. I came to get a receipt for my package that I mailed. Would you write

me a receipt, please? Would you make a list for her? Where's her list? Would you write the menu down for me, please? I need to have you fill out a form for me. Would you write down the schedule of your office, please? Would you write a note to Mrs. Smith? Would you write a letter to my mother? Would you write a letter for me while I'm waiting, please?" Barbara directed children to "write a letter" several times during each day.

Even though many of the above examples were stated as requests, they functioned as directives. The children responded by going along with their teacher to the extent that they were able to understand the meaning of the writing activity. Some children rejected or ignored her directions. There were times when Barbara pressed children to write --- and sometimes showed them how to write using cursive-like lines.

Angie: (Sits at table in house, handles papers, uses phone.)
T: (Talks across room.) Are you ready to um... to write your letter for Easter?
Angie: (No response)
T: I'll come over and we'll write for Easter. (Goes to house, sits with child at table) Now do you write a letter to the Easter Bunny?
Angie: (No response)
T: I wonder what he would do if we wrote a letter to him.
Angie: (No response)
T: Do you think he'd like to get a letter?
Angie: (No response)
T: I think he would. Let's ..... You write a letter, and I'll write a letter to him. OK? (Talks to other children.) Now what are you going to say to the Easter Bunny, Angie?
Angie: I don't know. (Shruggs shoulders.)
T: Where would you like to have him leave your Easter Eggs?
Angie: (No response.)
T: (Makes cursive-like lines on paper as she talks.) "Dear Easter Bunny, I will be at my house on Easter Sunday. I will have company at my house. I hope you will leave me

some Easter eggs. And if you have any extra Easter eggs would you please leave some eggs for my company? I will have six people at my house. I love you Mr. Easter Bunny. Mrs. Ray." Ok, now then you write your letter. (Points to Angie's paper.)
Angie: (Watches teacher, does not write.)
T: See I just made pretend. That's pretend writing. Because I talk faster than I write. So then I make pretend writing. Can you make pretend writing?
Angie: (Watches teacher, does not write.)
T: (Talks to other children, returns to Angie.) Ok. What are you going to say in your letter, Angie?
Angie: I can't think of anything.
T: Oh, you don't want the Easter Bunny to come to your house?
Angie: (Nods yes.)
T: Why don't you tell him that? Why don't you tell him you'd like to have him come visit you.
Angie: I don't know what to write.
T: Oh, ok. The Easter Rabbit doesn't care what you write. He just likes to get mail. See, he likes to have you write any kind of letter.
Angie: I'm gonna draw some Easter eggs on here.
T: Ok. That'll be fine.

Discussion

Barbara functioned as though the children needed to be told what and how to write --- as though they could not be trusted to self-direct their literacy learning experience. She neglected to ascertain the children's intentions prior to entering their play. Instead, she redirected their play to writing activities of her choosing in a lesson-plan way. Barbara acted frustrated when children did not write as she expected them to. Consequently, she pressured some children to the point of being cohersive. She apparently did not understand natural literacy development well enough to effectively respond to and facilitate the children's self-directed efforts.

Teacher - Debra Clark

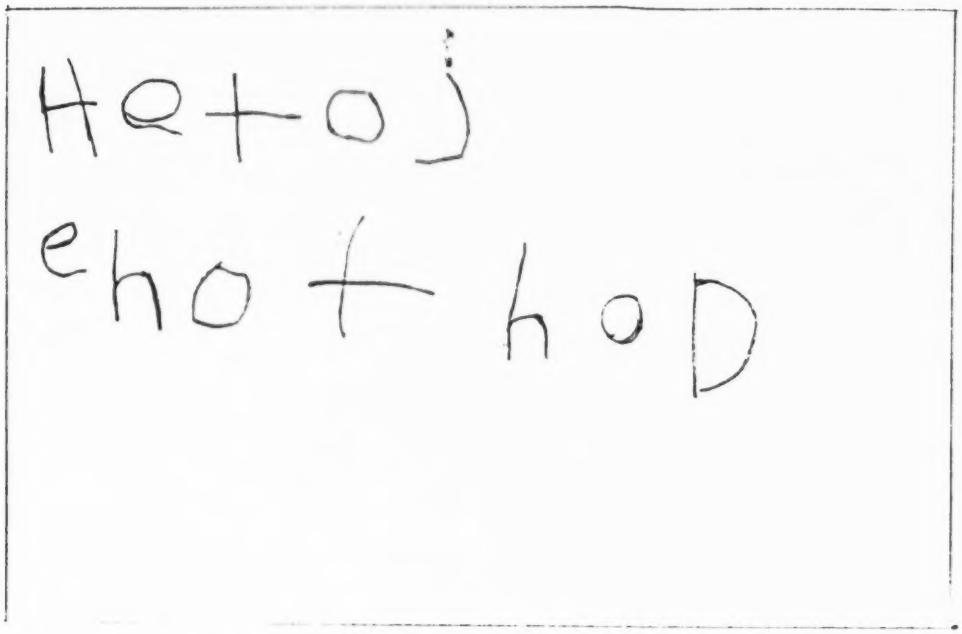
Extending Style Interaction

Debra regularly asked children what they had written: "What are you doing, Aralee? What did you write there? What are you doing, Travis? Are you writing a letter? What does that say?" Children told or read what they had written, or they indicated that they did not know or had forgotten.

Debra responded in different ways when children asked her how to write or spell for them. At first she told them the letters to write and how to form a letter. She also wrote words for children to copy. By the sixth day, however, Debra asked the children to go ahead and "try" and she would transcribe their writing. On the final day she told them to "do the best they could." Note the following episode and Figure 8.

Matt: Debra, I need to write down a list. (Takes pencil and paper, sits at table in the house.)
T: Ok.
Matt: I need some.... some more lettuce. (Matt had written a grocery list on day five, and the teacher had written the words for him to copy.)
T: Ok. Now then...
Matt: How do you spell lettuce?
T: Just spell it the best way you can. Ok? You can do a good job of it. (Goes to the office.)
Matt: (Later brings his paper from the house to the teacher in the office.) Look what I writed.
T: Very good! What did you write, Matthew?
Matt: (Looks at his paper.)
T: What does that say?
Matt: Ah.... H e t o j. (Names letters, points to his writing.)
T: Ok. And what does that say?
Matt: Um... I don't know.

Figure 8. Matthew's lists.



"lettuce, strawberries, tomatoes"

"pears, lettuce, carrots"

T: You don't know? Well, were you making a list for some lettuce awhile ago?
Matt: Uh-huh (yes).
T: Ok. And what else did you order?
Mattt: Some strawberries and tomatoes.
T: Ok.
Matt: (Leaves, writes, and calls to the teacher.) Donna.
T: What did you say here, Matthew? (Looks at his writing.)
Matt: I need some... a... I need some pears. (Points to his writing.)
T: Ok. You need some pears?
Matt: Yeah, I need some... I need some... lettuce. (Points to his writing, uses a reading voice.)
T: Ok.
Matt: And then I need some... some carrots. (Points to his writing and reads.)
T: Ok. Ok. Very good.
Matt: Is there any more paper we can write one? (Picks up paper from table.)
T: Yeah, there's all kinds of paper.
Matt: (Writes.)

Debra effectively modeled letter writing and mailing. She also modeled working as a mail carrier: "I would like to deliver the mail to the office. May I have the mail bag? Do you have some letters for me to deliver?" Children produced letter for her: "This is to Amanda. And this is to Tess. Here Debra, here's one more to Audrey and Amanda."

Redirecting Style Interaction

Debra redirected children from their play to writing activities she selected: "Is the mailman in the office doing his bookwork? What type of bookwork do you need to do? Would you like to write a letter to Grandma? Tyler, how about us coming over and making a list of what we need at the grocery store? Do we need to make a list, Clint, of things we would like to do? Christopher, I need someone to answer the phones in the office. Can you answer the phones in the office and take a message? I need to have someone

write a recipe down for me. Can you write that recipe down for me? Why don't you sit down here and let's make a list of what foods you want? I'll need to have you write down how many Legos are coming in. Tyler, go do some writing for me in the kitchen area for a recipe. Children either cooperated, ignored, or rejected Debra's directives. The following episode illustrates a shift in control from the teacher to the children as the play progressed.

T: I'd like to put in an applicaton for a job. Do you have any opening in your office?
Audrey: (Sits at office desk.) Uh-huh (yes).
T: Ok. What do I need to put down to... be able to work for you?
Audrey & Sarah: (Sit at the desk and look at the teacher.)
T: Do you have a sheet of paper that you need to have me fill out?
Audrey: Yes.
T: Ok. You want to hand it to me?
Audrey: How do you get it out? (Takes paper from pad in box on desk, hands it to the teacher.)
T: Ok. What do I need to put down on my sheet of paper? (Takes pencil from Audrey's hand.)
Audrey: Um... For the office we need.... um.... we're going to... the mailbox today and we need um...we need....
T: Do you need a mailperson to pick up the mail for you?
Audrey: Uh-huh (yes).
T: Ok. Do you need to know my name?
Audrey: Yeah.
T: Ok. Alright. (Writes) And so the job I'm going to be doing is going to be the mailperson. Right?
Audrey: Right.
T: Ok. Um... Do you need to know my telephone number?
Audrey: Yes.
T: Ok. (Writes) Do you need to know my address?
Audrey: (Nods yes)
T: Ok. (Writes) What else do you need to know about me?
Audrey: Um... If you can work at the post office... No, at the mailbox at nine o'clock.
T: At nine o'clock? Ok.

The teacher asked how late she would work each day, how much per hour she would earn, and when she would start. As soon as she started to work the control of the play shifted to the children.

Audrey: (Hands her letter to the teacher.) Will you take this to the mailbox?
T: Yes, I sure will.
Audrey: Thank you.
T: Ok. And I'll go mail them. Now after I get back what else do you need to have me help you do?
Audrey: Oh, not yet. We need you to um... go into town.
Sarah: (Hands a paper to the teacher.) Here, I would like you (inaudible). I'll be gone at lunch hour.
T: Ok. Alright, so we have... We have this already to go. Right? (Looks at Sarah's paper.)
Audrey: It needs to go to the mailbox. (Writes and hands the paper to the teacher.) Hey, Donna, I want you to take that to the mailbox now.

Discussion

Debra initially used an extending interaction style. She explored the play centers with the children, drawing their attention to materials and equipment and answering their questions. She effectively modeled role appropriate behaviors in writing and mailing letters and as a post office worker. As she became familiar with the setting, however, she became increasingly redirective. She introducted or requested writing activities children did not understand. She even directed children from one play center to another. Debra struggled with the wording of suggestions and questions when she tried to be responsive and spontaneous during extending style interaction. She was easily distracted, moving from one child to another, sometimes losing track of what she and a child had been doing. Her response to children's writings was usually limited to "What does it say?". She did little or nothing to extend their writing activities.

Teacher - Carla Carter

Extending Style Interaction

Carla generally approached children with questions about the intentions of their writing. However, she frequently failed to allow sufficient wait-time for them to answer. Consider the following strings of questions with no time inbetween for the child to respond: "What are you doing here today? You writing? Who are you writing to?" and "What are you writing down? Are you taking a message?" and "Janae, what did you write? Who did you write to?" Her initial questions were frequently based on an assumption about what the child was writing: "What kind of messages are these? Who's this letter to?"

The teacher consistently asked children about the content and purpose of their writing. She also asked them to read their writing to her and who it was to and/or from.

During two episodes children asked, even pressed, Carla to spell for them. The teacher encouraged the children to use their own judgment, stating her response in different ways as illustrated in the following episode. See Figure 9.

Adam: (Holds pencil ready to write.) Hey, how do you spell your name?
T: Would you just write it there? Please?
Adam: How do you spell your name?
T: (Talks to other child.)
Adam: Mrs. Carter, here's a letter for you. (Hands paper to teacher.)
T: Just put my name on there. (Point to paper.)
Adam: But how do I spell your name?
T: You can write it. I'll read it.

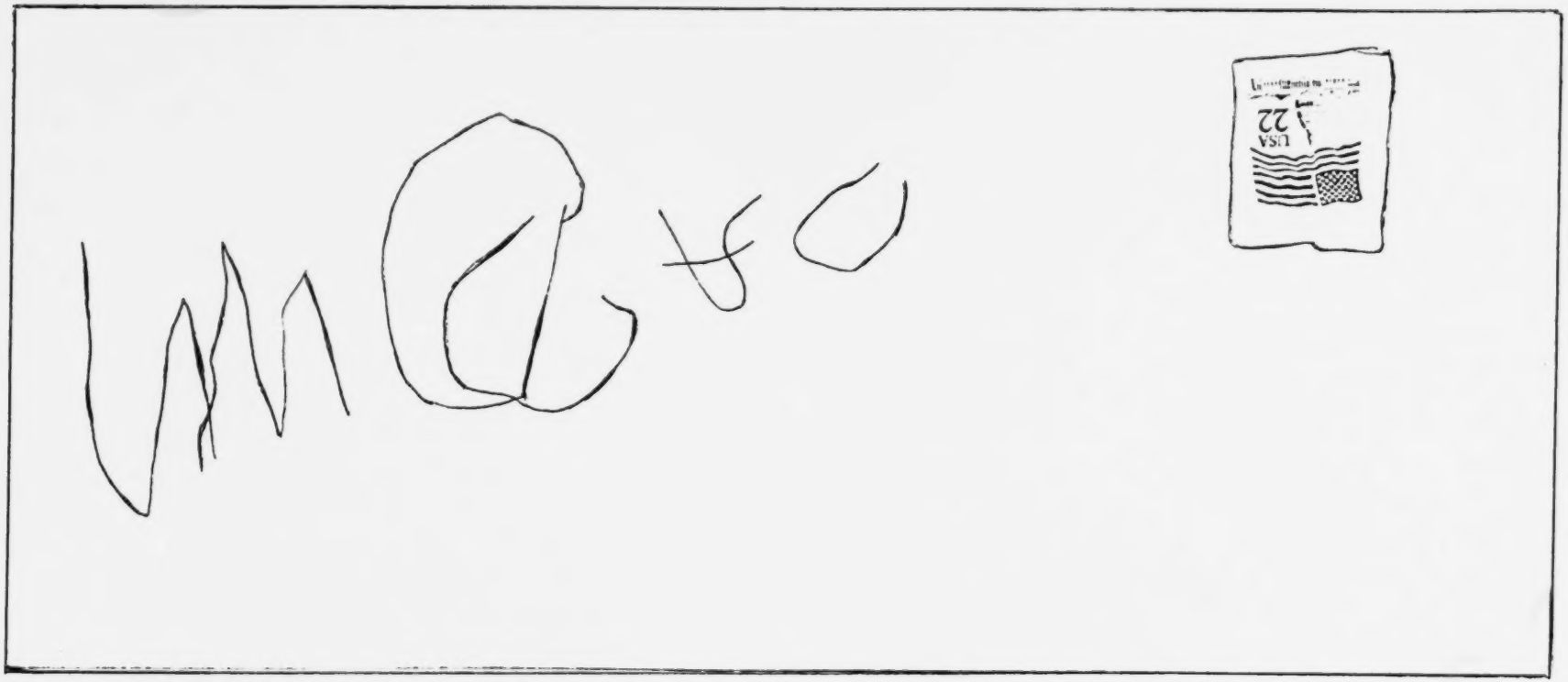


Figure 9. Adam's envelope. "Mrs. Carter"

Adam: How do you spell your name Mrs. Carter? How do you spell your name Mrs. Carter?
T: (Talks to other child.)
Adam: How do you spell your name Mrs. Carter?
T: You write it down. It starts with a C, and you write it down.
Adam. (Writes) There's a C. Now what's next? Now what's next? What's next?
T: There. OK. You're doing a good job. Just write my name.
Adam: Well what's next? I don't know.
T: Could you..... Could you write it like you think it might go?
Adam: (Writes) That way? After that?
T: That's good.
Adam: Here. Is that it? (Shows paper to the teacher.)
T: That's it. My name. It's a letter for me?
Adam: You have to put it in the [mail] bag.
T: OK. (Puts envelope in mailbag.)
Adam: I have to put it in your mailbox.
T: OK.

There were three episodes during which children asked their teacher how to write her name. Carla encouraged the children to write it on their own: "You write it. Let's see what it looks like when you write it." and "You write it. It starts with a C. You make it. Cause you run the office, not me. You can write it. Just like you think it might go. Just pretend... Like you think it would go." and " You go ahead and write it, ok?" Children responded by writing their own way.

Carla frequently acted to facilitate oral and written communication between children: "Sarah, Michael and Andy are ready to take your application. Blake, do you want Andy to fill out your form? Dorian, did you read the letter you received? There's a letter right there that's from Sarah. Janae, see what this letter says. You got a letter from Sarah."

This teacher respected children's efforts to maintain control of their play while effectively and spontaneously extending their learning experience. The following episode and Figure 10 are typical.

Blake: (Sits at the desk, uses the phone, and writes.)
T: Your phone's ringing again. (Points to Blake's phone.) I'm going to call you. Ring. ring. (Calls on post office phone.) I'm calling you.
Dorian: (Sits next to Blake and answers phone.) Hello.
T: Yes. Is Blake there? Is he in the office today.
Dorian: Um... yes. You want to talk to him?
T: Yes. Would you put him on the line please?
Dorian: Yeah. Blake, it's Mrs. Carter. She wants you.
Blake: (Writes) Would you tell her I'm too busy? (Writes)
Dorian: Yeah. He said he's too busy, so he will call you later.
T: Would you take a message for me?
Dorian: (Nods yes)
T: Do you have a note pad there to write it on?
Dorian: Um... yeah. (Takes note pad and pencil, holds phone with shoulder.)
T: Tell him I have a meeting this afternoon. Did you write that down?
Dorian: Yeah. (Writes)
T: Tell him I have a meeting this afternoon, and I'll call him.
Dorian: (Writes)
T: And I'll call him at 4:00.
Dorian: Ok. (Writes)
T: You got that?
Dorian: Yeah.
T: Ok. Bye-bye.
Dorian: (Hands note to Blake.)
T: (Talks to Jessica.) She took my message. She's going to give it to Blake.

Redirecting Style Interaction

Carla introduced three writing activities that appeared to be unfamiliar to the children --- filling out a job application form, a police report, and a catalogue order. For example, Carla went to the office where Andy and Michael were sitting at the desk and said, "I've come to your office. I'd like to apply for a job. Could I do that?"

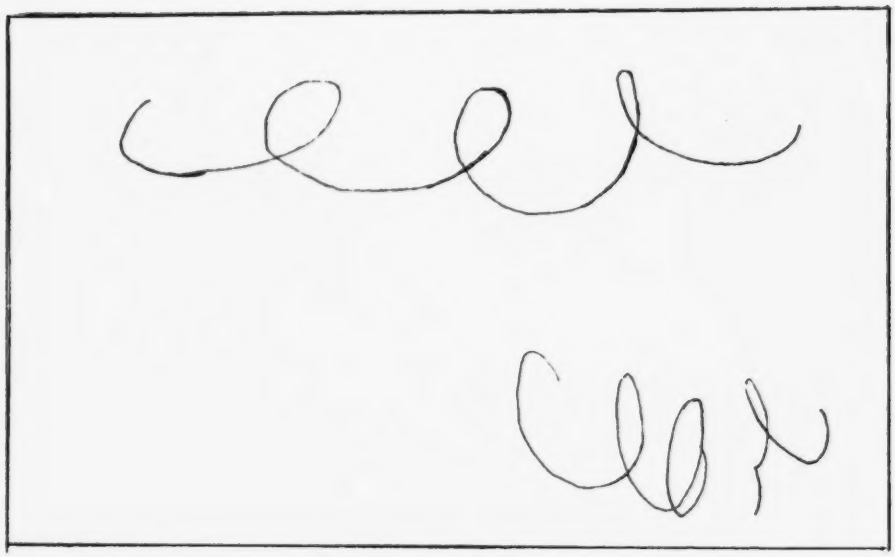


Figure 10. Dorian's phone message. "I [Mrs. Carter] have a meeting this afternoon and I'll call him [Blake] at 4:00.

Michael indicated that he did not understand what filling out an application form entailed when he said, "We're not paying the bank... We're not paying the mail today." and "But where.... We don't know... ." Michael then drew a map, handed it to the teacher and said, "Right there is the building. And right here is our building. You turn right. That's my building and that's his building." Michael and Andy continued to play in the office, but called it a police station and talked about "being on a case." Carla interjected, "Now you better write up a report. A policeman, when he solves his case always writes up a report. They write up what happens, where they found the man, did they get the money back yet... You have to write that all down." Michael went along with the teacher as she directed, "Write how much money and where it happened."

Carla pressed for application form and report writing during other episodes. David, however managed to shift control of the play from the teacher to himself.

David: (Sits at office desk.)
T: Could I... Could I apply for a job here? Can you take new job applications?
David: (Smiles at the teacher.)
T: I noticed that you had a form here. (Points to form on desk.) Could you fill that out, 'cause I would like to work here some day when I get (inaudible).
David: (Hands paper to the teacher.)
T: Could you fill that out for me? (Hands form and pencil to David.)
David: (Takes the form and pencil.)
T: Well you work here. Would you fill it out for me?
David: (Writes.) Here. (Hands form to teacher.)
T: Now what does this say? Tell me what this says so I will know where I am going to work.
David: You're going to work at the.... You're going to work at the....(inaudible).

T: At the realty?
David: Yeah.
T: I'm going to work at the realty?
David: Yeah.
T: And what time?
David: 11:30.
T: Good. Thank you for getting me this job.
David: Your job is over. You don't get the job.
T: I don't get it?! What happened?! I got fired?!
David: Yeah. Yeah.
T: And I was fired so I don't get my job?
David: Yeah. (Hands paper to teacher.) Sign right there. Right there.
T: Ok. I'll sign it. (Signs form.) Thank you.

By the fifth day of "playing application", Michael and Andy indicated that they better understood the writing activity. Michael said about Blake, "That guy's not sending a application. He just walked in the office." Carla explained to the newcomer, "Come over here, Blake, and make application and then you can go to work. They have to have an application form filled out. I'm going to fill out one, too." When Janae entered the post office she and Andy interacted without the teacher's assistance.

Andy: "You have to get a application from us to get in there."
Janae: (Approaches the desk.)
Andy: What's your phone number?
Janae: I think...
Andy Just pretend. Just make up a phone number.
Janae: 1 2 3... 4.
Andy: 1 2 3? (Writes)
Janae: (Watches Andy.)
Andy: Ok. (Puts paper in envelope.)
Janae: Can I work there now? (Points to post office.)
Andy: Yeah.
Janae: Ok. Bye. (Enters post office.)

Discussion

Carla was initially redirecting in her interaction style. She approached children with her plan for a writing

activity and continued with it even though the youngsters did not understand the meaning or function of the writing. Carla progressed quickly, however, in her ability to respond spontaneously to child-initiated writing events. She was especially attentive to child-child interaction and effectively acted to promote such interaction and understanding of oral and written language between children.

IMPLICATIONS

The study revealed ways in which teachers can facilitate early literacy development by functioning as participants within the context of young children's spontaneous symbolic play. The study demonstrates that symbolic play has great merit as a curricular tool for early literacy development. It can enable teachers to interact with children to make specific information available to them, and to expand the learning possibilities inherent in the play situations. Teachers are able to help children use literacy-related play materials in new ways. They can model functional writing, and can introduce new functions of print through suggestions. Children can be exposed to literacy concepts simply with a word, a question, or a momentary interaction provided by the teacher. When teachers respond to children's play, they have the opportunity to provide just those learning experiences which are meaningful to children.

Teachers evidently vary in their ability to function spontaneously and creatively in relation to the ever changing play engaged in by children. They are constantly called upon to respond to a number of variables and to make situational decisions. They cannot use preplanned lessons. This requires teachers to focus not on teaching per se, but on the **process of learning** which belongs to the child. Consequently, teachers must exercise self-control when participating in children's symbolic play. They must refrain from pressuring children to cooperate with the teacher's own preconceived priorities.

Hence, there is a need for teacher education programs which provide early childhood educators with information enabling them to create play settings in which children can explore functional written language. Teacher also need to become familiar with teaching-learning strategies that will enable them to function effectively within those play settings.

The study provides empirical support for Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development. Teachers interacting with children in the play settings were able to help children go beyond their present developmental level. The adult-child interaction provided necessary assistance which enabled the children to progress as writers and readers.

Vygotsky's research led him to three practical conclusions (1978, pp. 116-119). The results of this study

provide not only support for those conclusions, but also clues to how early childhood educators should organize the complex teaching-learning process.

1. "If early childhood educators are to provide writing experiences during the preschool years they should be organized in such a way that writing and reading are necessary for something. They must be something the child needs. They must be relavant to life."

This study demonstrates how classroom literacy environments can provide such writing experiences. The house, post office, and office enabled children to write for real-life purposes, to read their writing, and to discuss it with classmates and teachers.

2. "The writing and reading should be meaningful for children, an intrinsic need should be aroused in them."

The study indicates not only that writing and reading events occur in children's symbolic play, but that the children's motivations to write and read are intrinsic and serve no other objectives. Children who have control over their play situation can be expected to self-select writing and reading activities which are meaningful to them.

3. "Writing should be taught naturally. The activity should be engaged in in the course of children's play, and writing should be "cultivated" rather than "imposed". Natural methods of teaching reading and writing involve appropriate operations on the child's environment. Reading and writing should become necessary for her in her play."

The study demonstrates that natural literacy development can be cultivated within the context of children's symbolic play. Teachers who provide literate rich play settings for children have many opportunities to

interact with their students and extend their writing and reading abilities.

The findings lead to a particularly important pedagogical conclusion. Preschool and kindergarten is the appropriate time for teaching and learning writing and reading. The best method, however, is one in which both processes are found in children's symbolic play.

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APPENDIX A

Samples of children's early writings provided at the first meeting.

1. Cursive-like marks. Heather's list.

2. Invented symbols. Courtney's first writing.

3. Random letters. Courtney's second writing.

4. Random letters. Aaron's writing.

5. Ramdon letters and cursive-like marks. Carrie's list

6. Random letters, cursive-like marks, known spelling. Melanie's recipe.

7. Invented spelling. "Are you deaf?" (Bissex, 1980)

8. Copied words and invented spellings. Julie's list.

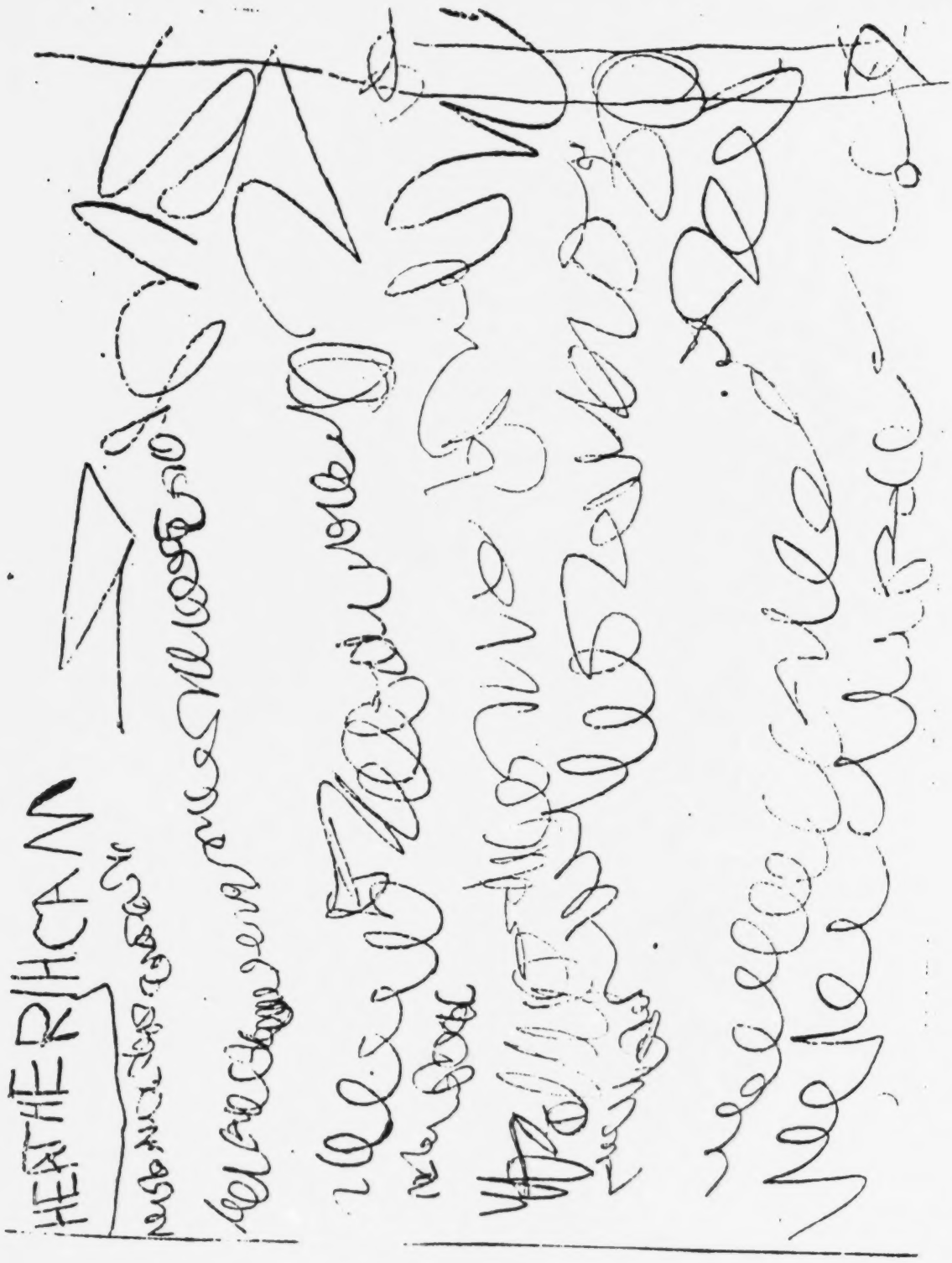
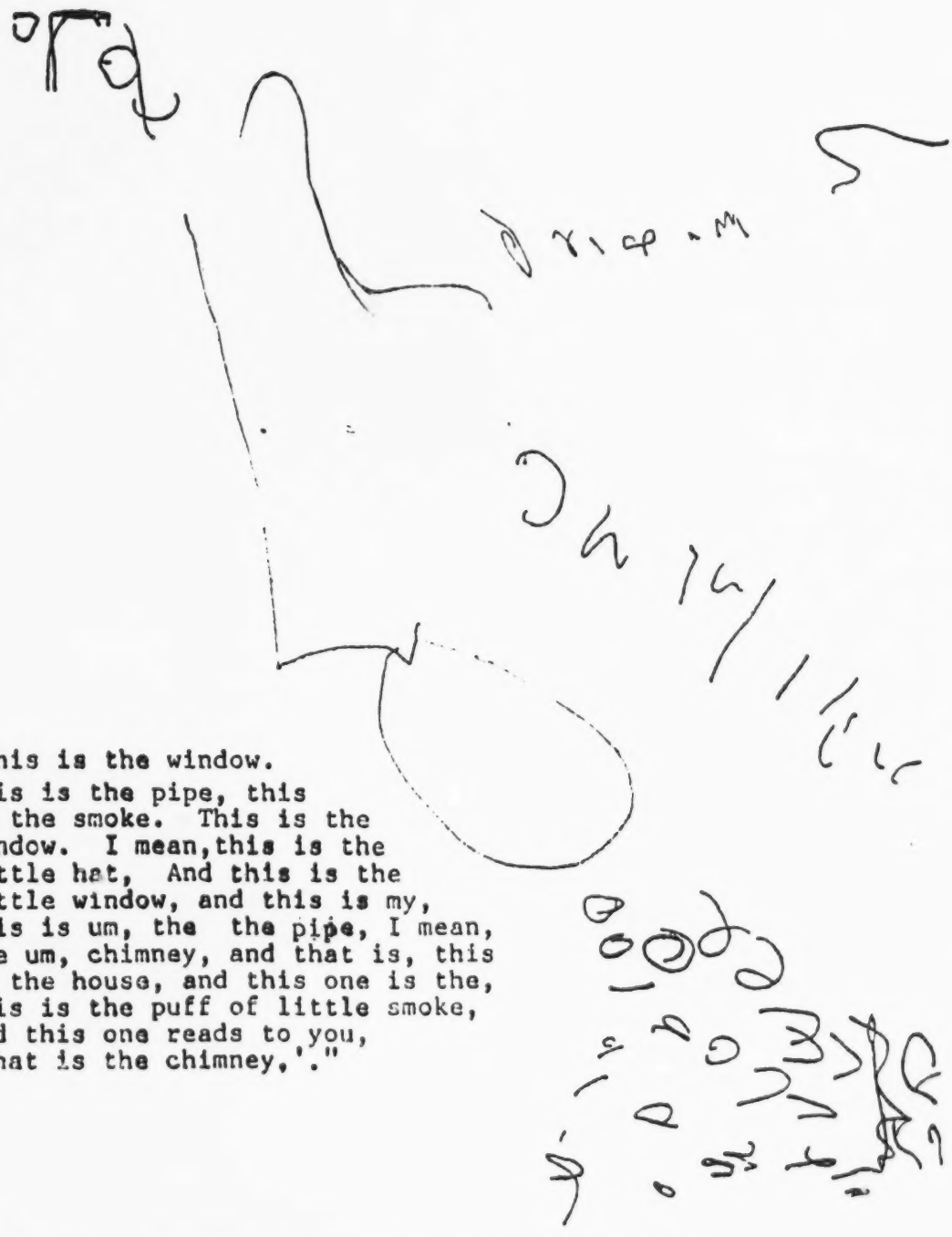


Figure 1. Heather's list.



"This is the window.
This is the pipe, this
is the smoke. This is the
window. I mean,this is the
little hat, And this is the
little window, and this is my,
this is um, the the pipe, I mean,
the um, chimney, and that is, this
is the house, and this one is the,
this is the puff of little smoke,
and this one reads to you,
'That is the chimney,'."

Figure 2. Courtney's writing about her drawing.

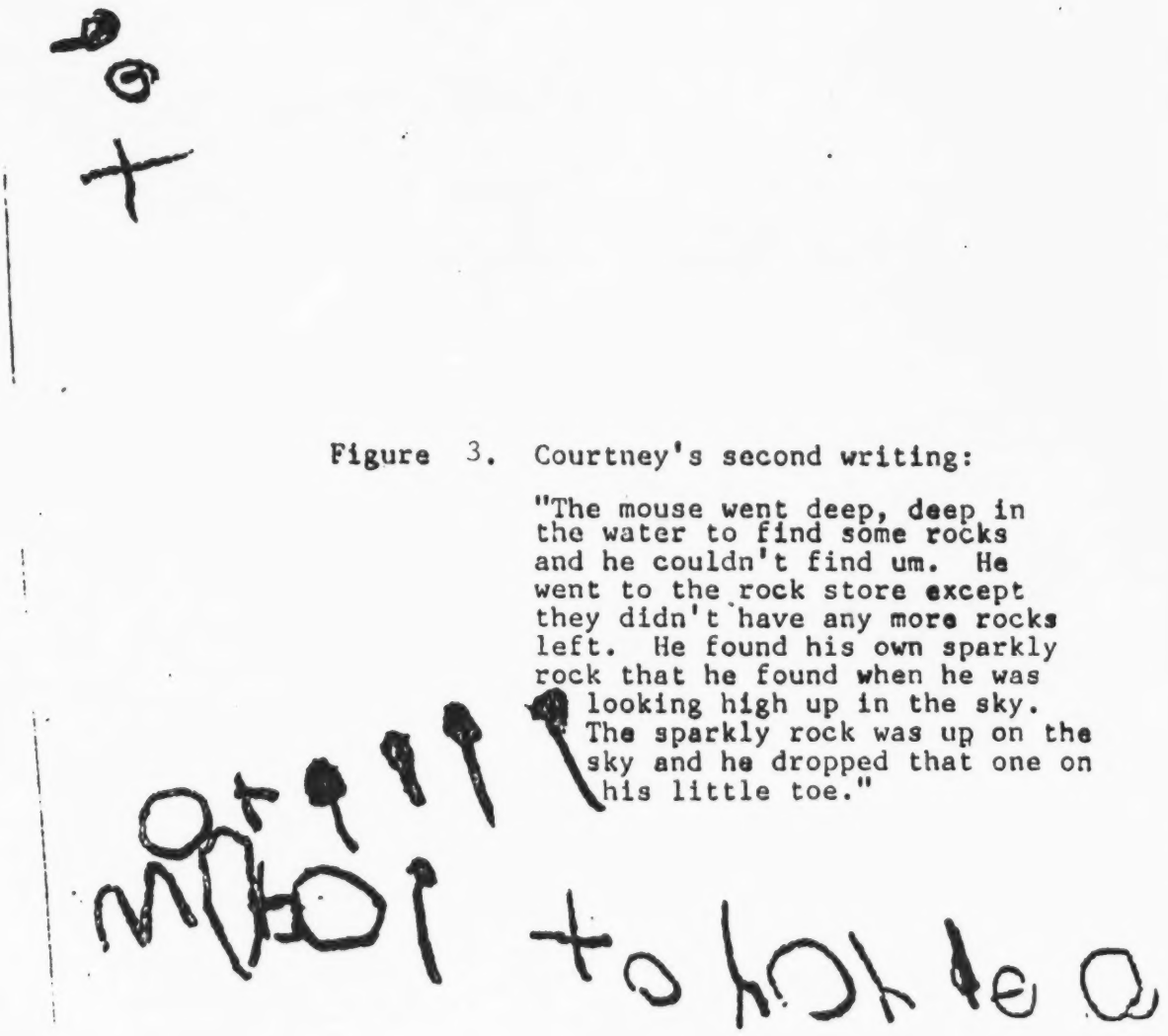


Figure 3. Courtney's second writing:

"The mouse went deep, deep in the water to find some rocks and he couldn't find um. He went to the rock store except they didn't have any more rocks left. He found his own sparkly rock that he found when he was looking high up in the sky. The sparkly rock was up on the sky and he dropped that one on his little toe."

Figure 4. Aaron's writing about his drawing:

"This boy is crying 'cause there is rain and it's snowing 'cause there's a monster outside in the snow."

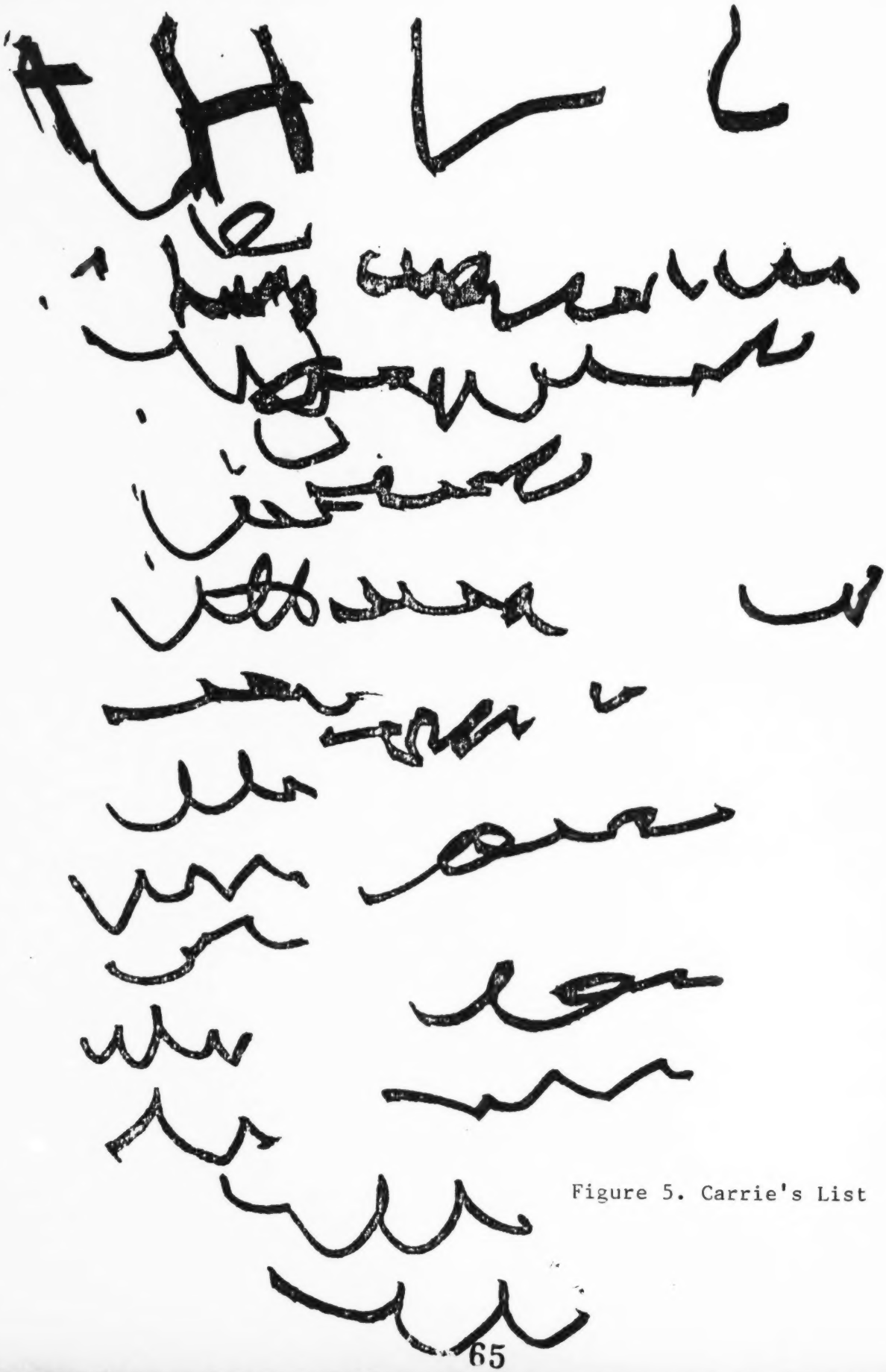


Figure 5. Carrie's List

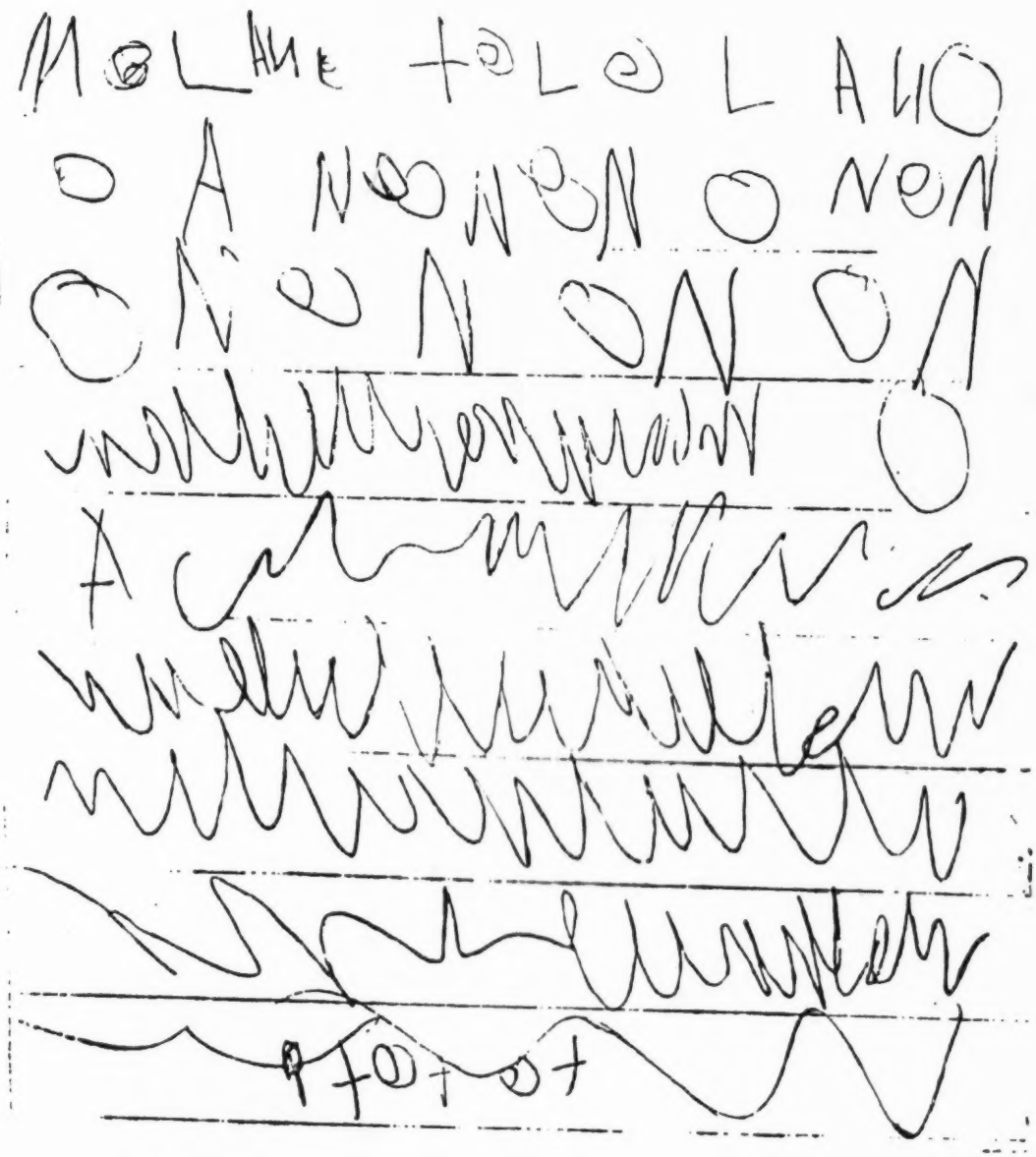


Figure 6. Melanie's recipe: "2 cups of milk and dough. 4 cups of sugar. 1 cup of nuts, 3 cups of honey and bread and 4 cups of [inaudible on tape]."

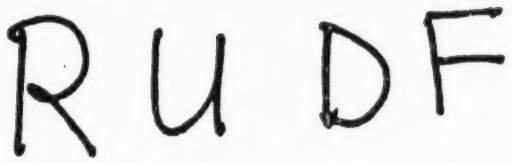


Figure 7. "Are you deaf?" (Bissex, 1980)

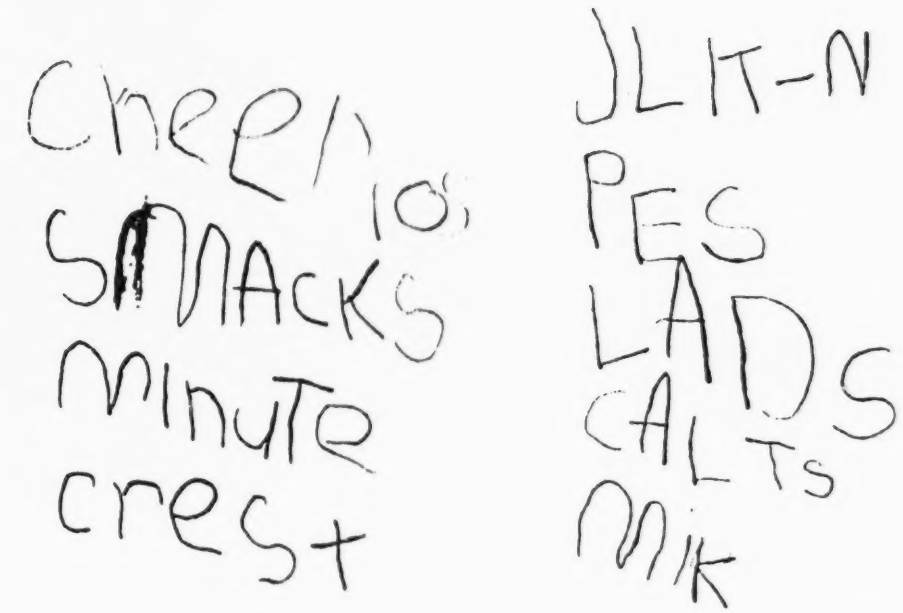


Figure 8. Julie's list.

Julie G.W. Feb.11

APPENDIX B

Examples of children's functional writings provided at the second meeting.

1. Brian's sign. "Phone broken"
2. Brian's sign. "Closed."
3. Thomas' alphabet cards.
4. Carrie's check
5. Deidre's mail.
6. Amber's check.
7. Jace's check.
8. Brian's check.
9. Brian's envelope.
10. Brian's phone number.
11. Jace's picture with name.
12. Brian's appointment.
13. Amber's letter.
14. Thomas' prescription.

Figure 1. Brian's sign. "Telephone broken."

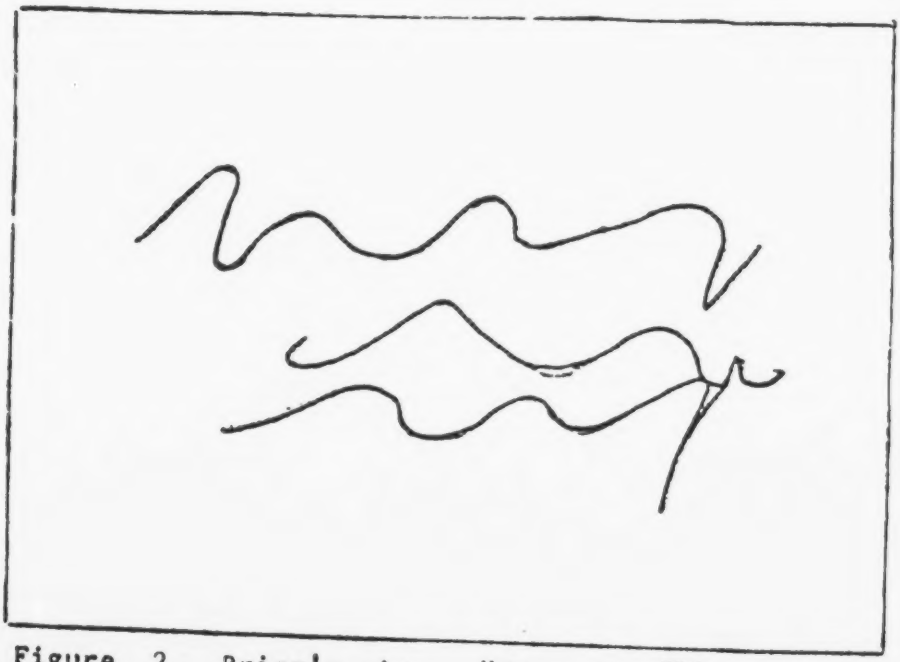


Figure 2. Brian's sign. "Closed"

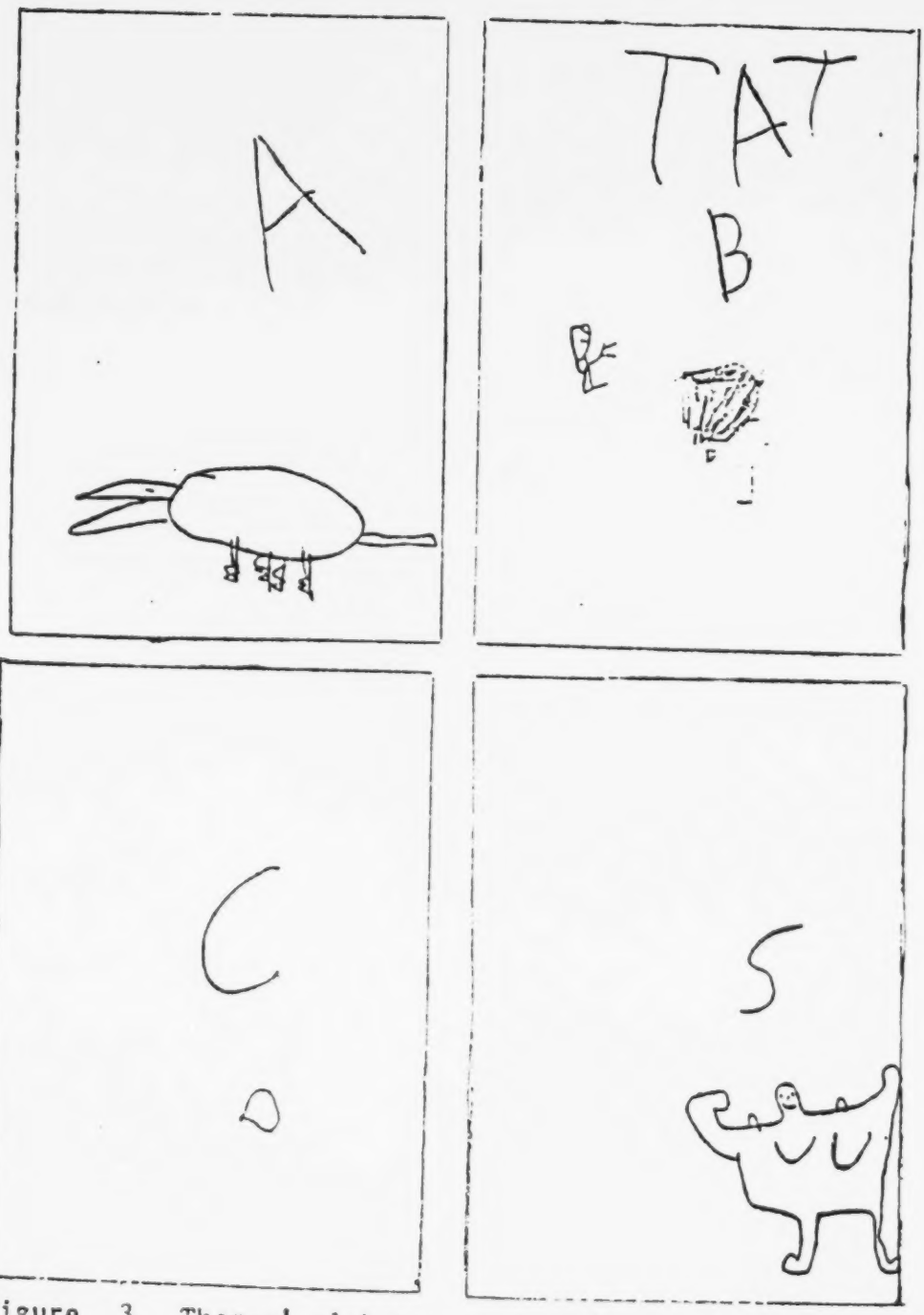
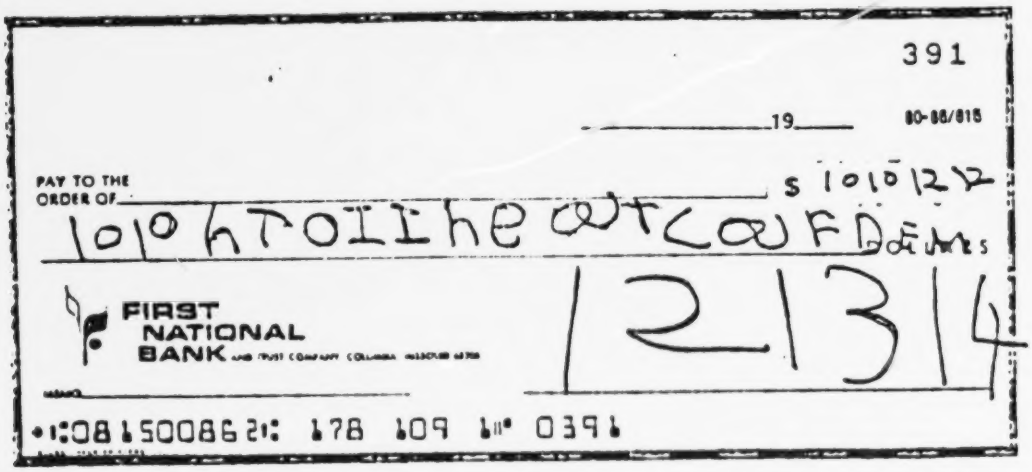


Figure 3. Thomas' alphabet cards. "A for Alligator, B for Bear, C for Circle, and S for Strongman."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19

80-88/815

PAY TO THE ORDER OF

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10 10 hTOIIhe @rCOUFDeiMrs

FIRST NATIONAL BANK

12134

•1:08150086 21: 178 109 1" 0391

Figure 4 .Carrie's check for $15 for macaroni and cheese and grape juice.

Figure 5. Deidre's mail. "I love you."

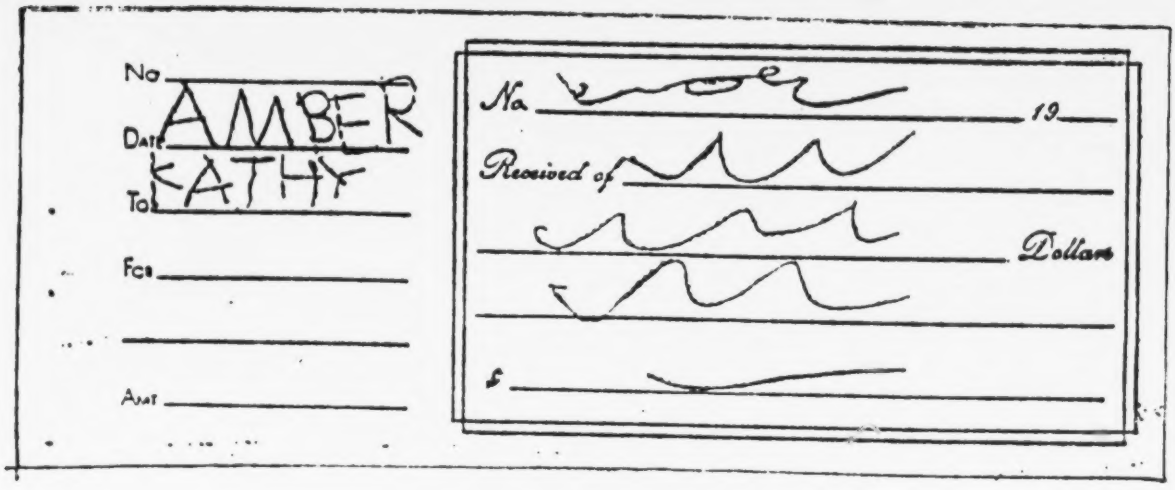

Figure 6. "It's a check worth $500. I was going to put it in my Tootsie Roll Bank."

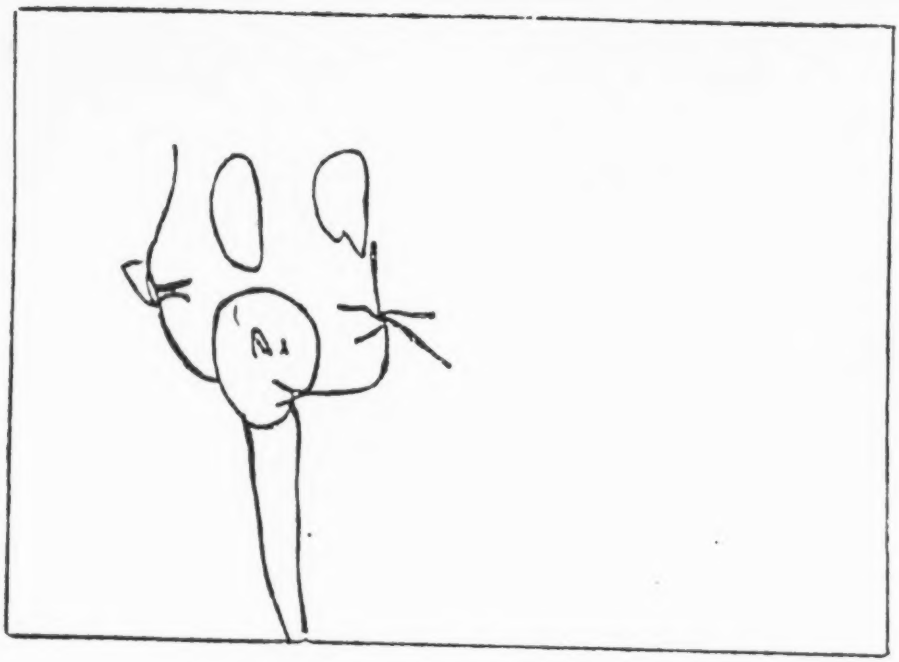

Figure 7 . Jace's check for the animal doctor for $100.

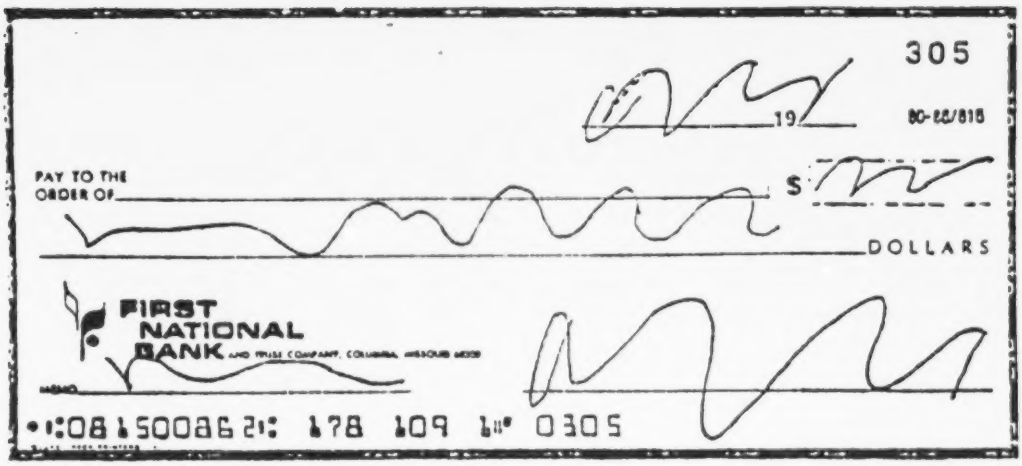

Figure 8 . Brian's checks. "To buy food --- tomatoes, corn, macaroni and cheese, and potato chips."

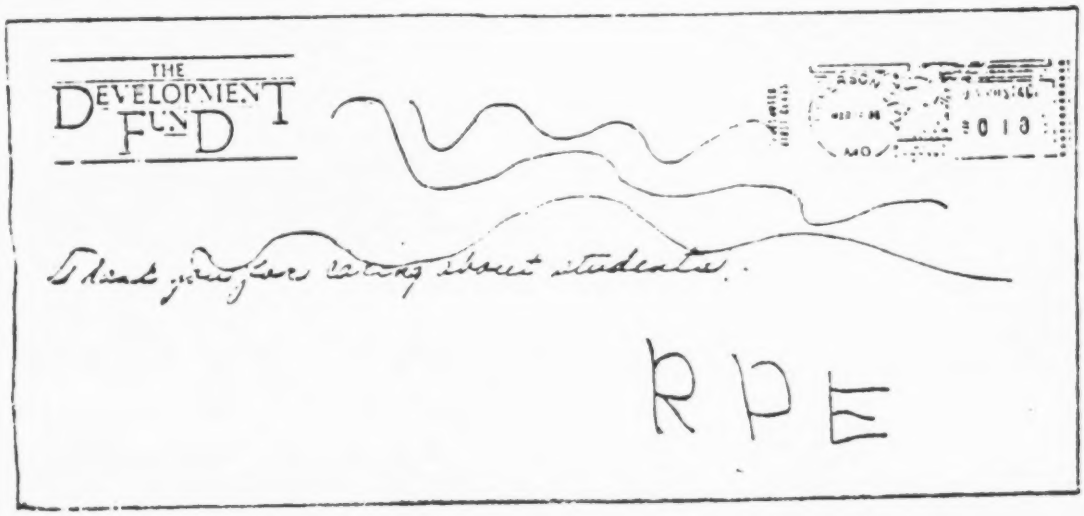

Figure 9. Brian's envelopes. "Don't open this."

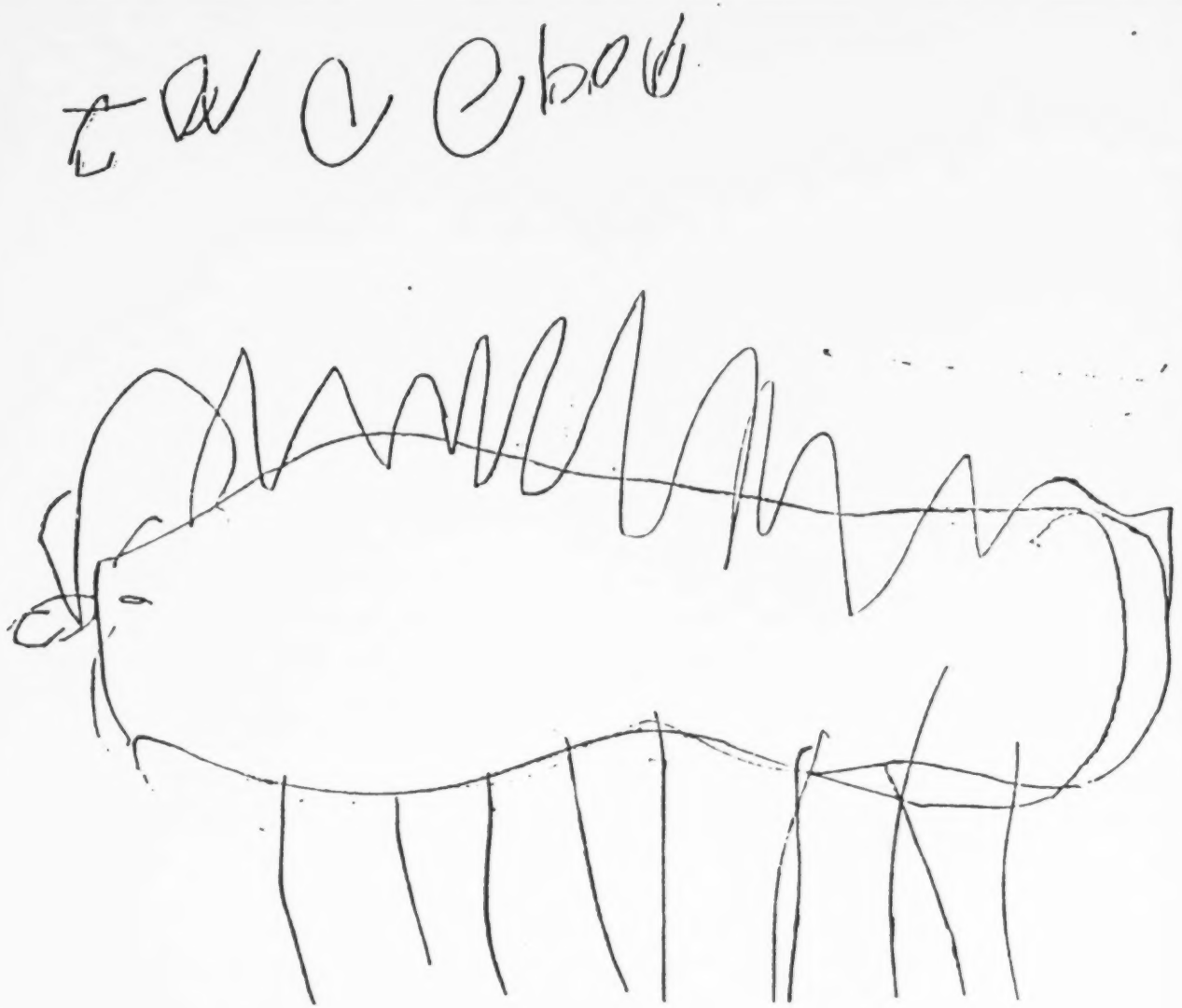

Figure 10. Jace's picture and name. "I drew around my foot. I made a nose. It is a dinosaur."

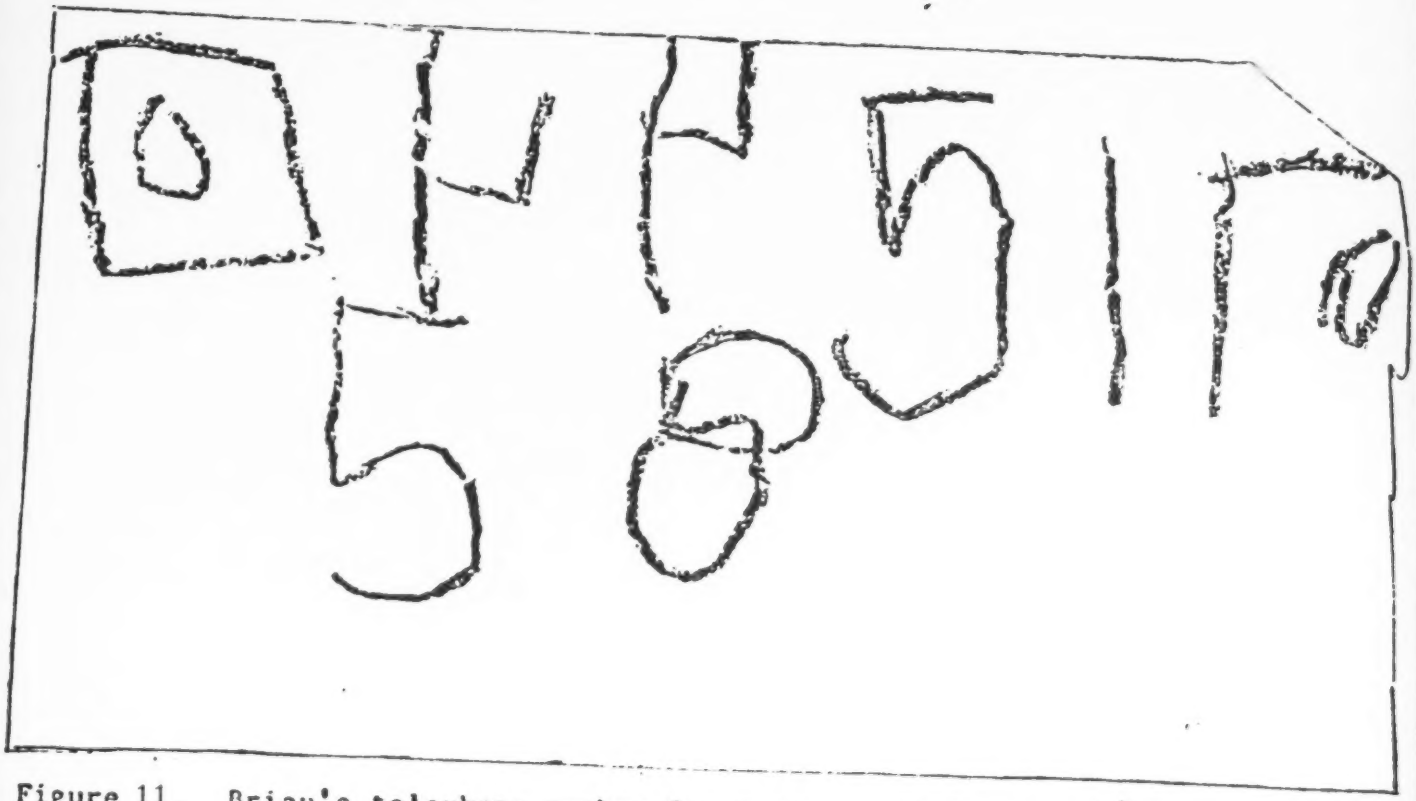

Figure 11. Brian's telephone number for Deidre. "It's Brian's phone number he gave me."

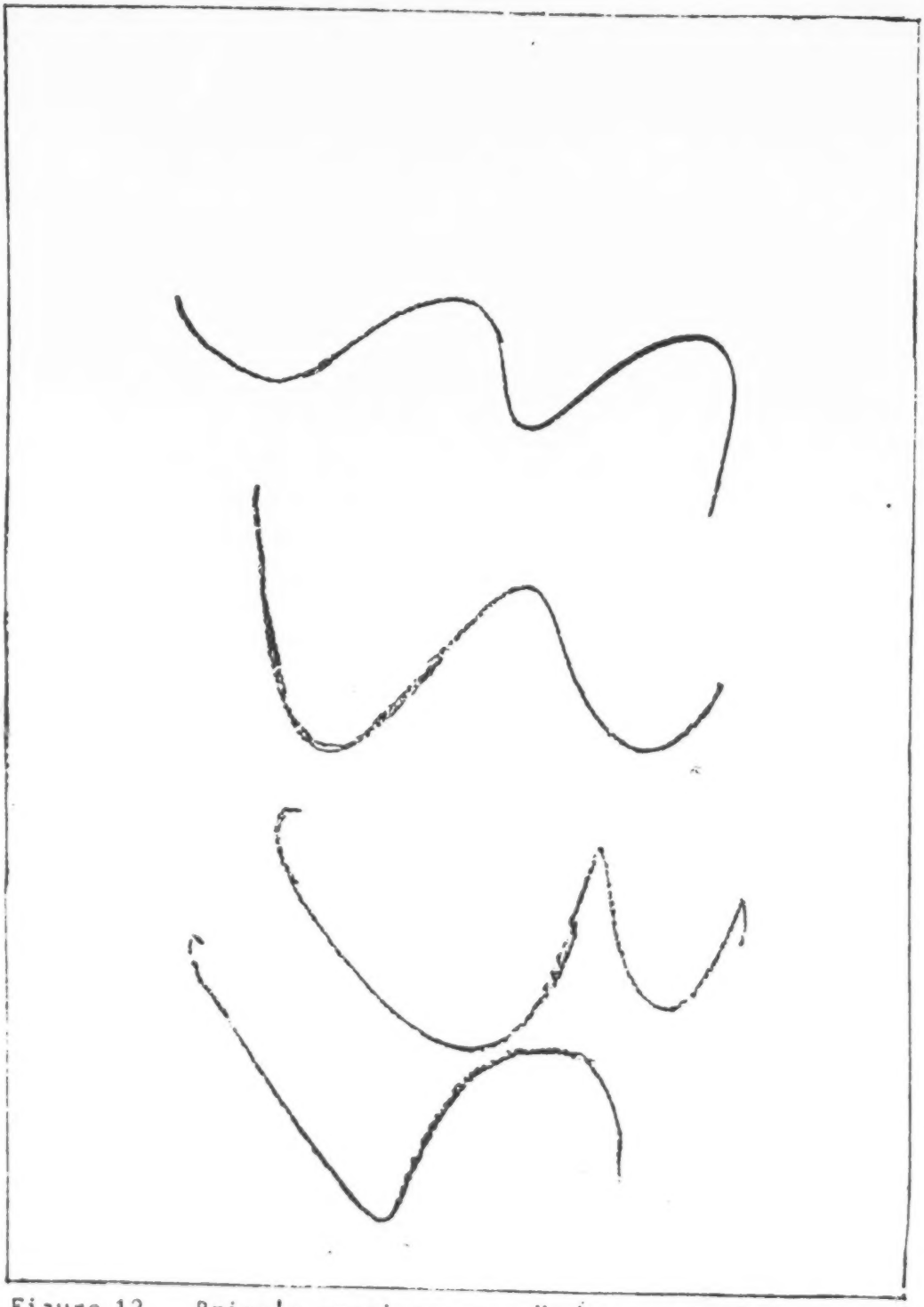

Figure 12. Brian's appointment. "I have a 5 O'clock appointment with Dr. Neia. I'm sick."

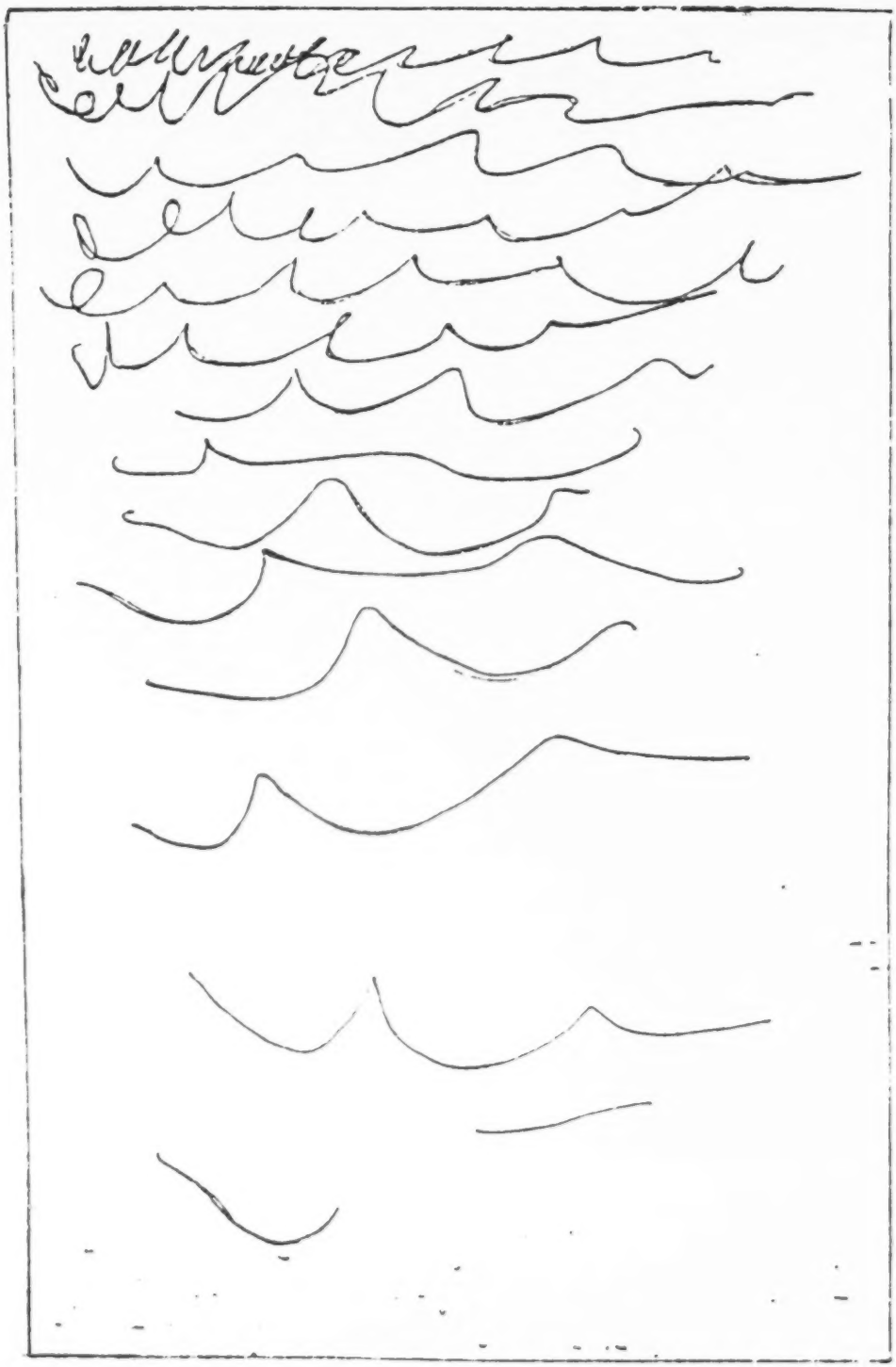

Figure 13. Hello Goldie, I hopeyou don't mind. I have to go to school some days, but I'll always come home. Love, Goldie "

Figure 14. Thomas' prescription for the bear. "Come back to the doctor next week."